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A PAINTED CLOTH

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A PAINTED CLOTH

By

GUY CHAPMAN

"A painted Cloth there was
Wherein some ancient story wrought
A little entertained my thought."

Traherne.



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FOR
MARGARET

*It scarce would calm my tremors could I dare
Believe one other critic half so fair.*

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CHAPTER I

A YOUTH sat curled up on the window-seat in an embrasure looking down on to Tom Quad, a book on his knees. His mind followed the printed lines with complete absorption, undisturbed by the noises without, the chunk of timber and the rough voices of the men who were shrouding the pavements of the great Cardinal's dream cloister with awnings for the ball that night, the muttering crow of the pigeons and the patter of water falling from the fountains. If he were to look up, you would see only the face of a very ordinary looking boy, the blurred outline of flesh which has not yet fully set to bone, the almost pathetic youngness of a colt, which marks the undergraduate all the world over. Should the face smile—for this boy smiles not only with his mouth, but with his cheeks and eyes—you will find that the mask is suddenly illuminated: even the straight thick brown hair may come alive; the small nose twitch; the line of mouth, which, for youth, is strangely repressed, swells and breaks up; the blue eyes soften. The face has suddenly become winning: a thread of intimacy trembles between you, glimmers for an instant, the eyes are suddenly shyly withdrawn and the thread snaps—

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but you feel that it is only because the light has gone ; the thread is still there. For the rest he is neither tall nor short, but beautifully built, slim hips, neat footed, a powerful enough chest, and capable hands to balance the dreamer's eyes.

"Martin !" called a voice from below ; and then again impatiently, "Martin !" A pebble hit the window pane. (One advantage in the name of that kindly young soldier saint ; it cannot be abbreviated with any satisfaction.) The boy in the window hastily shut his book and looked out. With his face turned up to the window stood a variant of himself, his brother Michael, an inch or so taller, a trifle older, a trifle thinner, hair curly instead of straight.

"Come along," he cried, "we're late."

Martin glanced up at the clock in Wren's tower.

"Only half-past five ; forty minutes. Come up."

The other tapped his foot impatiently. "We mustn't be late," and then at his brother's grin, blushed. "Oh, come on !"

Martin threw down his book and scrambled off the window-seat. In a minute he had snatched a hat and stood on the terrace. Affectionately he took Michael's arm at the elbow, as they set out towards the station.

"How have you done ?" he asked. His brother, two years his senior, lived in digs and rarely came into college.

Both had taken their schools a week earlier. Michael, already a graduate—he had achieved a First in Greats the year before—had entered for the Law School, while Martin had been taking History.

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Michael had gone straight through from success to success, with ease and an appearance of never working. He learned quickly, digested his knowledge easily, had enough of the showman's temperament to wear his scholarship lightly : and so was liked and accepted in a society where more patient virtues are not well rewarded. The presidency of the Union had been set off by an admirable comedy gift in the O.U.D.S.—and a short handicap at Radley purged him of the taint of smugness. In reply to Martin's question, he began to talk of himself with the unconsciousness of a scientist describing the course of a comet.

"I know I've got a First. I had luck in the special subject, but it was an alpha all right. They won't need to give me a long viva. This means the fellowship next year."

"It's a pity you are not going into the firm," Martin said, more for something to say than anything else. He had heard, knew by heart, his brother's programme of ambitions.

"Why ?"

"Well, we always have gone into the firm," objected Martin.

"Yes, and look where it led to. There were four partners in the firm and the place going to ruin once. If our great-uncles had not died off—I believe they committed suicide ; d'you remember that madeira of theirs the Governor broached on my twenty-first, and we had to pour down the sink ?—and given Father the chance to pull it together—well, we shouldn't be here. This isn't the day for family businesses with no one doing any work and

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all the family drawing fat stipends. How have you done, by the way ? ”

“ Rottenly.”

“ That’s bad. What happened ? ”

“ Nothing ; my own silly fault. Concentrated on the special subject—I know more about the history of Venice than any of the examiners—and never looked at the other stuff, *you* know, Hobbes and Stubbs’s charters and all that tosh. Result, a third with luck, a fourth without ! ” Martin kicked savagely at a lamp-post. “ I hope it won’t upset Father : I know he will be hurt.”

“ He won’t curse you, anyhow. Come to think of it, Father is much fonder of you than of Ambrose or me. Sometimes I think he almost hates Brose, while he looks on me as a kind of museum piece.”

“ And so I am,” he thought to himself. Aloud he went on in a somewhat hectoring voice. “ I can’t think why you won’t take a fourth year ; and why you want to go into the office. You have got the kind of solid plodding brain ” (there was no mistaking the touch of patronage in the voice) “ that makes the best kind of research worker. You could get one of the travelling scholarships on your head if you tried. And you throw yourself away for an effete institution like Ords’. I’d as lief be there.” He jerked his thumb at the Oxford Public Offices, that monument of the Gothic revival.

Martin made no reply for a minute : then he smiled suddenly and sweetly, and again—it was almost a caress—took his brother by the elbow.

“ Tradition—it’s not a bad thing, Mike. I like

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to carry on something in which our blood has been for over a century.”

“Oh, tradition,” the other answered impatiently. “My dear Martin, when our respected father dies, there won’t be much tradition left in the firm. Brose will see to that; and he will be senior partner. I know he’s working on schemes that would make the Governor’s hair stand on end—and you’ll have a precious small share in them with your traditions.”

“All the same, the traditions will be there. Every Ord that ever took a hand in the business revolutionized things as soon as he got in the saddle.”

“Yes, but you and Brose can’t, never will be able to, see eye to eye.”

Martin remained silent. The publishing house of Robert Ord in Lincoln’s Inn Fields was very dear to him from the day he had first been taken there by his father as a very small boy. He had always at the back of his mind that plain white house with its ridiculous lead cupola over the door supported by four fragile, airy pillars. He loved his father’s room on the first floor with its mingled scent of cigar, rosewood, old leather and fresh flowers. The firm had come here in the ’seventies; handy for Booksellers’ Row was the reason, for Holywell Street, now in limbo with all the rest of Alsatia. Even then it was old and respected. More than a century before the first Robert Ord had come from Scotland (“So do most of your countrymen, Sir,” quoth Samuel Johnson) in the days when to be a Scot was almost to be a suspect, but like most of the

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burgesses of the civic lowlands, he had his craft at his finger tips. He set up in St. Paul's Churchyard, and having by devious and, I dare say, unscrupulous methods, won the—unvoiced—respect of Horace Walpole, did a handsome trade with that artful old woman and impressed on his son, who in turn imparted them to the next generation, a number of profitable tips against the day when the close-hedged Strawberry Hill library should fall into the market. The first Robert Ord was a man of imagination, but never in his handsomest dreams had there loomed the great building that stands to-day in the Strand, with its tower, from which a circle of light leaps out into the night in a gigantic flickering O, the Ord Press, the most conscienceless of all publishing amalgamations ; wealthy, it is believed, but balanced on air—called goodwill—air that may be blown away by some warmer or colder current sweeping through popular imagination, and topple the whole structure into the abyss of dead enthusiasms.

The first Ord died at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Robert II was as good as—no, better than—his father. In his youth he had been wise enough to learn something of his trade in Paris under Chardin : and when the Revolution came and the *aristos* fled from their fine homes, he bought their libraries cheap from their stewards or from the *sansculottes* who took over their offices, and made a fortune. He had the luck, too, to assist the eccentric millionaire, Beckford, to escape from Paris to Bienne in the bonnet and robes of a woman of the streets, a disguise of admirable verisimilitude,

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enhanced by Vathek's shrill, piping voice, to which a shrewish note added the finishing touch. The turn served him well, for to the end of his days, Beckford bought extensively from the Ords : and they were willing enough to put up with his violent temper and ill-mannered sarcasm for the profits they secured.

The second Robert died in 1833 and was succeeded by his four large and solid sons, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew, the eldest, who had been born in 1800, had, before his father's death, developed the wholesale side of the business and had dabbled in publishing. On Robert's death, he liquidated the bookshop and, with his brothers, set up a publishing house in the now thriving Strand. His first venture was a series of cartoons of English life, drawn by the inimitable "Mug" and published in fortnightly parts. To make up the weight, he engaged a young hack writer to do him some accompanying letter-press in the comic vein at the fee of a guinea a thousand. The hack—there is no doubt about it—had genius ; and after the first number all London was hurrying down the Strand every other Thursday night to secure its copy. Such prosperity gave a fair wind to the Ord galleon (even the hack made money) ; and an era of splendid, solid luxury opened for the family. Matthew remained unmarried : the other three all took wives to themselves, but fortunately, from the point of view of the business, none had children save the youngest, John. John, otherwise undistinguished, seems to have done most of the social side of the business : his and his wife's names

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are continually cropping up in the literary correspondence of the period, though nothing either of them ever said has been deemed worthy of record. Publishers were looking up in the world, and John gave dinners at his house in Spring Gardens which even Thackeray condescended to eat, though he sneered at his host's preference for dry Sillery over the sweet and fashionable champagne.

John's son, Robert, was born in 1848. John had grown proud. Whatever knowledge and education he and his forbears possessed had been acquired in the way of trade, but his successor must be something of a phenomenon. So Robert Ord, his dark red curls flying in the wind, trotted across the Horse Guards parade ground every morning to Westminster School, where he was nourished on Plautus and Terence and learned from Dr. Scott of the great lexicon to mouth his Latin in the ugly but intelligible accent of Queen Elizabeth's day. From Westminster he went to the House, just missed his cricket blue, got his First in Greats, and returned to London, complete with auburn whiskers, light trousers and cutaway coat, to serve his apprenticeship in the family business.

Things had changed considerably in the twenty-one years which had elapsed since Robert's birth. Matthew, who was the real brain of the organization, had died in 1856, leaving his quarter share to his nephew. During the next fifteen years, with no sound judgment to guide it, the firm had been slowly drifting downhill. Nothing was actually wrong, but the three elder Ords complained that business was not what it had been, though in fact no business of its

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nature could have supported the solid magnificence of the brothers, their large gloomy houses, their heavy silver and heavier cut glass, their wines, their horses, and, in one case, glasshouses for rare orchids.

Robert soon discovered that unless matters were taken strenuously in hand, there was nothing left for them but bankruptcy and disgrace. The death of his father, by which he acquired another quarter share of the business, placed him in a strong position. He flung himself into the business with a fury unintelligible to the previous generation. His better education not only gave him a sense of power over his disastrous uncles ; it was of immediate service to the cause. Moreover, he had a rough tact that skirted difficulties. Though well read, he was not ostentatious of his scholarship ; though often didactic and prejudiced, he could also be sweetly reasonable. He had been welcome in many sets at Oxford, could take a hand at whist and utter an opinion on the traditions of Canon Law, or the prosody of Pindar with equal tact. Omniscience was an undergraduate foible as much in the late 'sixties as to-day ; Chrichtouns must always be rising to astound the world. Yet, behind this brave facade, was the granite of the small Scots bookseller who had earned respect from Twickenham. Robert Ord learned to sweat over proof sheets, and to swear over manuscripts, to be civil to authors he disliked yet prized, to watch and judge movements, moments and figures, to be patient with printers, to be severe and yet kind to his travellers. He studied printing and legibility of type with the eyes of both artist and mechanic and learned all he could

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from the examples of the Pickerings and Whittinghams ; so much so that in later years he was heard to declare that the youngest compositor at Chiswick knew more than that damned advertising charlatan, William Morris, who died of fright because he thought the Socialists had found him out.

Night after night, the policemen patrolling the muddy Strand would see the lamp burning in the upper windows of the office ; and, until they knew its meaning, would try the door and bring down on their heads the vituperation of a hard-working, irascible young man.

Such pertinacity could not but bring luck to its aid. Luke Ord, after an unusually long period of soaking, was found face downwards in the ornamental pond with which he had insisted, against the advice of more foreseeing heads, in beautifying the gloomy laurels that shielded his gloomy house in Lewisham from the road. Three shares now lay in Robert Ord's hand, and with their acquisition, he gave an ultimatum to the sole survivor of the elder Ords, Mark. The house in the Strand was sold—it surprised Mark to find how much money it fetched—and the long lease of the offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields acquired. From that day the business of Ord began to flourish as it had not done for thirty years. When Mark died in 1875, the firm was, to all purposes, Robert, and no one else. He was liked ; he was respected ; he was hail-fellow-well-met with half the literary men in London. He had picked up and set on their legs half a dozen writers who only needed a believer to bring out the best in them. (Bunt, you may recall,

wrote a long piece about him in his will, and left him his copyrights.) He was a member of two good non-political clubs, and—as became a follower of Palmerston—he belonged to the Reform. Not yet sufficiently eccentric to be worthy of immortality in caricature—the red side whiskers had shortened with fashion—he was well enough known to earn an epigrammatic flick from Dizzy, whom he abominated as much for his politics as his novels. (“Don’t talk to me about the Suez Canal,” he was wont to growl; “Rothschilds loaned him the money at ninety; and we, *we* have the pleasure of paying the Jews an extra ten per cent. as well as the two-and-half per cent., instead of a decent three-and-half from the Bank of England. Bah! Levantine rat.”) He had edited two or three obscure mediæval texts and indulged in incomprehensible battle in the columns of *The Athenæum* with those critics who dared assail him, and, as modern scholars admit, left the field redder with other blood than his. In short, he held that thing so admired of his contemporaries, a position, with a prospect of rising to whatever heights publishers aspired fifty years ago, certainly not to the Coalition knighthood some day to be achieved by one of his sons. That son, however, was neither of the two boys who, this afternoon in June 1913, were mounting the ramp to the station at Oxford. . . .

The fact that his brother was even more neatly dressed than usual had not escaped Martin’s eye. He was quite aware that Michael was not meeting the train that was bringing their guests to Oxford, from ordinary courtesy. The presence of Aurea

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Marsh was the reason not only for this new grey suit, but also for their arrival at the station a good ten minutes before the train was due. He approved Mike's taste: Aurea was pretty, if he was any judge, and appeared intelligent; whether it was all window-dressing he had not yet made up his mind—how could he in three or four brief meetings?—and in any case, he was not particularly interested, except on his brother's behalf. As they strolled to the end of the platform, he dismissed her from his mind, and took up again the problem he had set himself a dozen times before of what Oxford had looked like from the west before they had carefully screened it with the goods yard and the gas works. He would almost change places with the long-crumbled west-country poet who must have strode down the Osney road, to feel that check of the heart which this first view of the delectable city might have caused: but, then, the seventeenth century poet would probably never have felt it. His still unsolved puzzle was disturbed by the scream of an engine. The 4.50 from Paddington (does it still run, the 4.50 of those Elysian days? Does the 9.50 still bring its roisterers home to reach their doors at one minute to midnight?) was swirling into the station. The flutter of a handkerchief at a window had already sent his brother dashing up the platform, and banishing his dream construction, he followed, dodging the other odd fifty youths similarly employed. He arrived at the carriage door as the owner of the handkerchief flung herself on to the platform.

“Michael darling, how divine you look,” said a

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gay voice, "Like Meleager. Here is Atalanta—I mean Aurea—burning to fall into your arms. And Martin! Poor Martin, did Mike make you come too? Martin, after you have introduced me to ten elegant and eligible young men, you may have all the dances I can spare. Do you know, I feel I am a siren; don't tell anybody; they may be frightened."

A fair, brown-haired girl patted Michael, who gave her a hurried smile, and caught Martin's arm. Deborah Dare was the boys' first cousin, a wide-mouthed, laughing girl of eighteen, with eyes large enough to make one look twice at them to discover they were both beautiful and kind, and a nose, small and tilted enough to proclaim one to whom adventures befall. Her descent to the platform revealed her companions. Hesitating on the step, an appeal for chivalry in her golden eyes, stood Aurea Marsh. Conscious of her beauty, for Martin's condescension of "pretty" had not catalogued her shining black hair, her thick creamy skin, or her full-lipped mouth, she swayed slightly before accepting Michael's reverent hand and venturing a small foot to the platform. The modes of 1913 were conceived for Aurea Marsh. When were dresses ever since the eighteen-thirties designed for just such convincing femininity as the first years of George V's reign discovered; the small toques trembling to fantastic points, the ridiculous frail capes, the first shortening skirts that whispered such delicious confidences? A pretty woman knew she had never before been so arrayed for homage; and she obtained it. To Michael she

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held out one small gloved hand; and he, so apparent was his case, looked at her with the eyes that all men or women hope to see once in their lives turned towards them. The watching Martin thought that the grimy platform ought to feel his brother's emotion and, in response, blossom with violets. He had little time for such fancies. He was assisting Aurea's mother to descend; a large, florid lady, handsome at three and forty, with hair as black and as glossy as her daughter's. As he felt her weight and heard her voice, he wondered how his father had enjoyed the company of this opulent and garrulous brunette. She was talking even in transit.

"Martin, dear boy, how glad we are to see you. These dreadful journeys—I am sure we have lost something—we always have ever since my poor husband missed the connexion at Basle—and left me wandering about the continent of Europe with nothing but a packet of sandwiches. So hot, too, and all for a dance. I can't think why people want to dance in Oxford—of all places," she added inconsequently. Inconsequence had been one of the chief weapons in Lucy Marsh's armoury, the only one she had kept unstained through the vicissitudes of years.

While she hurried on, the carriage, darkened in the shadows of the station, disgorged a fourth woman, tall, slim, faded and elegant, Fanny Dare, Michael and Martin's beloved Aunt Fanny, wife of Roderick Dare, K.C., and sister of the gigantic figure still withdrawn from the public gaze in the recesses of the carriage, where it could be heard

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through a cloud of muffled oaths and ostentatious groans, lowering bags, suit-cases and hat boxes from the racks. Fanny offered a cool cheek to her nephews and said: "Do help Robert, darlings; he'll explode if he suffers from any more feminine incompetence." The boys hastily flung themselves into the carriage; the luggage was extricated and dispatched by servile porters to the line of waiting hansoms; and, last of all, like the leading tenor through the pandemonium of an opera chorus, Mr. Ord was revealed—there is no other word to describe that majestic lowering of eighteen stone—upon the platform.

Robert Ord was now in his sixty-fifth year. People had been wont to say that he ought to have gone in for politics, on no other grounds than his obvious, but refined, resemblance to Vernon Harcourt. He was built on majestic lines that are no longer bred, with an amplitude of figure and head which gave birth to the phrase, "the heavy swell." Clad in cautious grey and a panama hat, he looked less than he was, a man of singular competence, passion and charm, but to his sons he was nothing less than Jove. To each he presented a dogskin glove, while he muttered in his deep voice, "Glad to see you, my boy." His eyes twinkled with pleasure as he regarded them, more particularly Martin, who resembled his dead wife. The procession formed up and marched off to the cabs. Here a certain amount of rapid manœuvring took place, until one hansom drove away containing Michael and Aurea.

"You aren't as clever as Mike," remarked Deborah to Martin as they brought up the rear with

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the luggage in an antique fly. "Instead of acting as baggage guard, you ought to have carried off the lovely lady—me—in a hansom."

Martin wrinkled his nose and grinned. "If you think I ought to be in love with you, I'll do it next time. Besides, if you had noticed, it was Aurea who really contrived it. Mike followed her lead."

"You're a mean beast, Martin," returned his cousin. "How can you talk like that about Aurea, who is the sweetest, cleverest, loveliest girl . . ."

"And knows it, too," interrupted Martin. "Besides, she isn't a patch on you, Deb," he added without conviction, trying to make amends.

"I wish I could think so," sighed the young lady, "but when I look into my glass," she suited the action to the words, by producing a small mirror from her bag; and then uttered a faint scream—"Oh heavens, Martin, why, why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"There is a most enormous smut under my left eye—a regular smudge,—and all Oxford looking at me."

"You used not to be so nice. Only last summer you were running about with your skirt—if you could call that kilt a skirt—all torn and your hands covered with mud and scratches."

"Don't remind me of my shameful past. I am now a young lady of marriageable age. I'd curtsy if this beastly equipage would stop wobbling and showering suit-cases on my lovely shoes. Oh, Martin, will there be heaps of lovely young men to-night? I want to fall in love."

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"Well, Mike will introduce you to some of the lights of the hunting field, I expect, nice fellows who wear boots and ride phantom point-to-points up and down the room. And I've got some hefty fellows in tow who exercise their legs as if they were rowing at Henley. Don't find me another relation, Deb; I'll step into the breach myself."

"You? Martin darling, you know I disapprove of you . . ." but the laughing remonstrance was cut short by an avalanche of bags as the fly horse nearly fell down in drawing up at the Mitre.

At dinner that evening, Martin watched Aurea. He was seated at the end of the table facing his father, who was flanked by Aurea and Mrs. Marsh. Aurea, he thought, had tact. She devoted herself to Mr. Ord, making him chuckle, and paid to Mike no more than the courtesy due to a neighbour. Robert Ord was enjoying himself. Aurea had tapped a vein of reminiscence and Robert Ord, warmed with food and wine, let it flow.

"In those days we weren't as pernickety as we are to-day. I think I was one of the first to bring a bath up with me to Oxford. That would be—let me see—in '67—the year Falkirk—Lord Fabian as he then was—was sent down for running his horse in the Lincolnshire. A thousand pities Fabian never made up his mind what he wanted to be—a great traveller, a great philosopher, a great sportsman or a great politician. He could have been any two, but not all four. So he has just done nothing."

"How interesting," the girl replied, "we, that is my mother and I, are distantly connected."

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"I had rather not believe it, my dear; the family is not noted for its looks. Each succeeding generation seems to invert Darwin's theory."

Aurea beamed on Mr. Ord; and Martin, who knew from his father's manner that he was dealing out a heavy compliment, frowned with the unkindness of youth and thought "The girl's a fool."

"Who are the Marshes?" he asked his aunt abruptly. Mrs. Dare, gloomily immersed in her dinner and the prospect of an at least six hours' ordeal of the ball, replied vaguely, "I really don't know—or, of course, I do know really. So pretty, isn't she? I mean Aurea—and so correct—she can be trusted anywhere." Still she looked indulgently at her daughter, who by the simple processes of her eyes, had already thrown the odd guest, a young man called Essex Poole, into a state of burning ecstatic confusion, thereby causing him to drink too much wine.

"Yes, but who are they?" Martin insisted. "Where do they come from?"

"Oh, we have known them for years. Roger Marsh was an old friend of your uncle. He was at the Bar, a little money and neither brains nor prospects. Lucy Keston was at school with me. They fell in love, got married and found they had not enough money to live in England, so they drifted to the Continent. Roger died a couple of years ago and they came home—I don't think he was an entirely satisfactory husband—nor was dear Lucy, I imagine, a very satisfactory wife—nothing *wrong*, you understand, but so temperamental."

The temperamental lady having failed to extract

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any coherent explanation of Oxford from Essex Poole, had claimed Mr. Ord's attention.

"How charming your boys are," she said, "so nice looking. I know I ought to be content with Aurea; she is a very good girl, but girls are such a nuisance; they will have babies either sooner or later, and leave it all to me."

Meanwhile Michael and Aurea were talking in low tones.

"I don't want to dance very much," the girl was saying, "and with no one except our own party."

"Remember you have promised me the three before and the three after supper," Michael urged. "We can slip up to Martin's rooms—there won't be anyone there—I want to talk to you. I must talk to you." He added the last phrase with a sudden breathlessness and dug at the table-cloth with a fork. Aurea looked at the carved profile. "I'd love to," she answered hesitatingly, and turned away.

As the men waited in the hall, a tall man suddenly touched Mr. Ord on the shoulder.

"It must be—that head—that majestic port—it is my old Robert! How are you?"

"Hullo, Drake. It is ages since we met. Why do you never come to see us?"

"I don't like your trade, Ord," returned the other mysteriously. "I don't like publishers. They lie in wait for poor little creatures like me, to devour us. I saw two of the breed in the billiard room of the Athenæum a night or so ago. They were playing at different tables. Dog doesn't eat dog,

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I suppose. I fled back to Oxford when I saw it."

"Are you coming to the House Ball?"

The other grimaced. "I am afraid I don't like the human race. I shall go home and read the works of Pitcher. Literature has its consolations."

"You know my boys? Michael . . . Martin."

"They flatter you, Robert. Take my advice, young men, and abjure your father's evil business before it is too late. Come to lunch to-morrow. You are engaged? You will come, Robert? Good. One o'clock then."

The slow withdrawal of the sun's long fingers had left a glow in the air over Tom Quad. As if to rally humanity after nature's retreat, the lights in the college hall glowed welcome. The squeaking and plucking of strings defied the good-night cries of the birds in the Deanery gardens. A shadowy figure was lighting little lamps and sending them to drift in Mercury, the fountain in the centre of the Quadrangle. The silly sight caught Martin's fancy as he watched; a fairy, fragile, artificial world was being pricked into existence by a dark magician—probably one of the porters. But the world held. The gold of Aurea's frock, the blue of Deborah's, glinting through and below the folds of their mysterious cloaks, their fair skins, their bright hair as they stood clasped at the foot of the staircase, struck the final chord of the overture. The curtain must rise in one minute on some quite inhuman puppet play of the lightest emotions, of whispered nothings; Mlle. St. Georges, Rosine or Dorina Nonacrina, Oxford, Vienna, Venice would float in

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the air for some perfect seconds, and then would melt and vanish leaving only these grey walls to remember whether they had or had not existed, and the walls, as they had done for centuries, would keep their secret, until on some such other night of the future, they would again betray it.

For Martin the early part of the dance was remembered simply as a gallimaufry of bright lights, scents and noises. The college hall was packed to stifling. The dowagers occupied a third, the band a quarter and in the intervening space some three or four hundred couples strove mightily to surge round in rhythmic harmony to the swing of *Songe d'Automne*. That many of the participants had only a rudimentary idea of dancing—indeed, many had only been induced to be present by the violent pressure of sisters—added to the difficulties and dangers of making a circuit of the room. Thick tangles of revolving couples would occasionally come to a dead stop owing to pressure from the outside. From one of these, he saw Mr. Essex Poole with Deborah firmly clasped to an already limp shirt-front, apparently kicking his way out of a protesting scrum. His partner, he noticed, had both her feet off the floor, was chuckling and obviously enjoying herself. Martin himself had gallantly wheeled Mrs. Marsh round the room for the first number ; and was thankful to hear her warning his aunt against joining in these athletic pleasures. “ I don't know what I have lost, Fanny dear, something very personal, I feel sure.” He took up a place beside his father who had resigned himself to

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an enjoyably gloomy evening. "Heaven defend me from such an exhibition," he replied to Martin's suggestion that he should dance. "Old as I am, I still have some self respect. Look at that damned fool, Burke"—he nodded at an ancient, white-bearded and long-toothed don who was violently two-stepping a frightened girl through the crowd—"he was up with me, as mild as you make 'em, and now look at him. No. I shall join Ledbury in a cigar in a few minutes, and after supper, take your aunt and Mrs. Marsh home. Go away and dance, my boy. There will be plenty of time to talk in the morning."

Martin waited for a few minutes. Mrs. Marsh was doing her best to appreciate the pictures. "Yes—very nice—so distinguished looking . . . like one of those old Harrovian Kings," he heard her saying in a vague voice. He caught a glimpse of Michael and Aurea floating slowly past him like twined wisps of straw upon the current. The girl was looking to her side and Michael gravely watched the lovely profile. "They don't dance awfully well," thought Martin critically ; but added hastily, "still, they suit each other." He edged his way out of the room in search of Deborah, and ran into Essex Poole on the stairs. Mr. Poole had just rushed to his rooms to change his shirt. "My third," he remarked with mingled sadness and pride. "You can't ask a girl to lean on the noisome mess I've just taken off."

"You shouldn't hold your partner so tight, Essex," said Martin.

"Rot ! they like it," was the superb reply. "But

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I wish you hadn't given your cousin Parma violets : they come off, y'know."

"Even on your face, my lad," rejoined Martin cruelly. "Have you seen it lately?"

"Oh, my hat! Martin, you don't say . . ." The observation was left in the air. Essex Poole's long figure was streaking back to Peck.

Martin, strolling casually along the cloistral awnings, was suddenly aware of Deborah's voice saying loudly, "I prefer the Fernie country myself." He caught sight of her seated in a low arm-chair talking to a youth whom he knew vaguely as a member of the hunting set of another college. Both she and her partner looked up as he passed. His cousin made a diabolical grimace and winked swiftly. Martin made no sign of recognition, but retired to lie in wait at the foot of the staircase. Deborah appeared a few minutes later. "Who was that?" they both began. "Oh Martin, how *awful*. I arranged with one of your young men to meet him under Gladstone's picture—and this turned up. It smiled and so I smiled, and it was only after I had been nearly torn in pieces by the mob he pushed me through—he used me as a battering ram—that I found he wasn't the man, and what was more he had arranged to meet me—the other girl, that is—under Lord Salisbury's picture—(Don't they ever read old *Punches* at Oxford? or can't they understand writing?) However, he seemed happy and began to talk about hunting. I chatted about martingales and wind-galls and told him of two or three jolly little hunts he'd never heard of—so I expect he is quite happy. Perhaps your

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friend danced with my man's girl. Who was he ? ”

“ Waghorn—bit of an æsthete.”

“ Well, she can have a happy time inventing a very old and rare pottery, bless her . . . Martin dear, you really dance very well.”

“ You're my best partner, Deb. I'd rather have you than anyone I know.”

“ Better than Aurea ? ”

“ Heavy as lead, but docile. She is a stupid girl, Deborah. She rehashed three stale witticisms as her own and tried to patronize me as Mike's brother.”

“ I don't think she is very clever, Martin, but she *is* a dear, and really beautiful.”

“ Maybe,” replied Martin casually. “ Now keep quiet and dance.”

There was, now that supper had eliminated the elders, more room in the hall. Deborah and Martin swayed and swung together like a mechanical toy. They were both younger even than their years and took their accomplishment with childish gravity. The band was playing better than ever. Reinforced by food and lavish drink, they burst forth into song to a popular waltz tune, “ *Charl-ee*, what will you buy, what will you buy for Mau-dee ? ” The ridiculous words and the cheap tune echoed in Martin's brain as they left the hall and went along to his rooms. “ Martin, what will you buy ? ” Almost his last night in Oxford. A new world to be found, opened and swallowed ? What kind do you like, luscious or lean ? He shook himself. They had climbed to his rooms, and were leaning out of the

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window of the thirder looking down on to the Quad. Deborah, half guessing his thoughts, stretched a childish hand across the stone division and pressed his.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know, Deb. I don't know what is and what isn't. I don't want anything yet."

"Michael knows."

"Mike always has known. He's frighteningly ambitious for himself. But all the things he wants, success, money, influence, power, mean nothing to me—or nothing yet. Perhaps it will seem different when I get into it."

"It?"

"The world."

"I expect so. How lucky you are, Martin, though you don't know it. I would give anything for your chances to do something,—something real."

"But you will, Deb. You will be married in a year or so."

"Bless the child's heart! Do you call that something? In two, three or four years, if I am lucky, some nice man will graciously condescend to marry me, will permit me to bear his children, to look after his and their ailments, to run his home comfortably, to applaud him in all his attitudes, to quarrel with him when he feels like it, *et patati et patata*. You call that real? My dear Martin, it is only too brutally actual. Mother knows all about it, but she won't split. Besides, she was sensible; she played up her delicate health, so Father, who worships her, got completely taken in. But *I* couldn't do that.

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It isn't fair. I would like—oh! almost anything—banging a typewriter—better than what I am bound for.”

She propped her chin on her hands. “Life is cruel hard on women,” she proclaimed from the experience of eighteen; “unless you happen to be an Aurea. She is the type that men adore.”

“Mike is particular.”

“Hush, they are coming along now. It is time we danced again. Let us go.”

They passed through the sitting-room. As Martin was opening the door, Deborah suddenly flung one arm round his neck and kissed him. “Never mind, Martin; we're both being silly. I shall make a sweet young bride, and you will come devotedly to all my parties—in spite of your inevitable wife. Promise!”

“I promise,” said Martin dutifully, and kissed her again. Lightly given and taken, the kisses sealed a selfless bargain. Deborah ran down the stairs and caught Aurea in her arms at the bottom.

“Darling Deborah,” said the elder girl, “you'll look terrible to-morrow morning if you are as active as that.”

“Don't care if I do,” said Deborah; “if I was as perfect as you, I might, but with my nose—oh me! Come on Martin, they're playing *Dreaming* again.” Martin ran after her. He had caught a glimpse of his brother's face under the lamp: “the forlorn hope look” he thought it. “Poor old Mike!”

Michael and Aurea mounted the stairs to Martin's rooms in silence. A fire was burning in the open

fireplace in spite of the season. The curtains were drawn, shutting out the first shimmering whiteness of the June dawn, and a small table lamp threw a discreet brilliance disguising the ugliness of the furniture. A jug of lemonade stood on the table. Michael offered the girl a glass and as she refused, gulped two hurriedly himself.

Aurea arranged herself gracefully on Martin's shabby sofa, half concealing her face with a large feathered fan swept lazily to and fro. She smiled mechanically at her host. Though they were actually of the same age, he seemed so very young, so very boyish; she felt not a little well poised contempt for him. In spite of her smile, she was, in fact, not unjustifiably annoyed. She had danced—a thing she loathed, for she did not, she knew, dance well—for more than four hours, four hours that could have been spent to vastly greater profit in bed. Was she not a beauty, and beauty demanded certain tributes? She would have to drag through possibly four more ineffable hours before she would be free to go to her room, and then not for bed, but merely for an hour to repair the ravages of the night, before setting out on some ridiculous and certainly uncomfortable excursion. Michael had kept her to himself all the evening, but had not been either entertaining or even apt to flirt. A gloomy taciturnity alternated with bursts of extravagant but impersonal conversation. She knew the meaning of these signs very well: she had learned a number of things about men in the three years she had been out, but she was not yet skilled enough to rush him over the fence at which

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he was balking. At the moment he was standing at the mantelpiece, his shoulder averted, massacring a cigarette in rapid clouds. As she looked at the chiselled profile—both boys, she had noticed, had at this angle a definite affinity with coins of the young Tiberius—an irrational spasm took her, half pity, half some other indefinable emotion, sensuous and delicious. She wanted this youth, she knew—and an instinct told her that could he be brought into the open, it would not be to one of those unfruitful ballroom skirmishes, but to an encounter, if not of definite result, at least of strategic value.

“Tell me . . .” she began.

Michael swung round, throwing his cigarette away. He seemed to be bracing himself for the shock of battle.

But Aurea was dexterous ; the battle, if it was to be, should be fought on her ground. She had not moved, except for the arm which carried the fan to and fro in slow regular sweeps.

“What are you going to do when you go down ?” she went on. Then, as he moved towards her, she pointed to a cushion lying by the couch. “Sit down and tell me.”

Half relieved of his stress, flushing too at his relief, Michael obeyed her. Sitting here looking at her, so close to her, he felt the air round her warmer, livelier by her perfect health and her beauty. Her skin seemed to exhale some living charm.

“When I go down ? Do you mean for the vac ?”

“No, no, when you have finished—what do you call it—taken your degree ?”

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"I am going to the Bar eventually," he told her, more easily: the so often self-communicated tale of his ambitions was an ever recurrent theme in his head; to tell them eased him. "I believe I am going to be given a fellowship at Hereford next term. During that time I shall get called to the Bar—I have eaten nearly all my dinners and I have only the final to pass. I shall stay here for two years, chiefly to write a book. At the end of 1915 I shall come down and go into Roger Carrick's chambers in Pump Court—he has a lot of work and he has promised to take me in. I ought to be doing pretty well by the time I am twenty-eight—that is, with luck—and then I shall start on politics. Tory, of course—I don't see much chance for a man on the Liberal side—not enough party solidarity. I ought to have a big enough junior practice by that time to let me at least dabble, and if I can take silk by the time I am thirty-five there ought not to be any more difficulties."

As he was mapping out the future, the girl on the couch was realizing that the boy before her—he looked even more boyish in full face—was handsome and more intelligent than she had admitted. As he talked, the softness dropped from his face, the nose and mouth took on lines of determination: a dominant tone enriched his voice and authorized what he was saying in such a way that she believed what he foretold must inevitably come to pass. She leaned forward and said in a warm voice:

"How marvellous."

Michael had looked down as he finished his sentence; but his eyes rose again at the quality

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of her voice. Their eyes met. Helplessly they bent towards each other. Their hands caught, and last of all their mouths, which had waited hungry hours for this second, came together. So locked, they clung together for a time. Words came brokenly.

"You do?"

"Oh, I do. I love you."

"Adorable Aurea."

"Oh, my dear, my dear."

Presently they recovered.

"And you will do all you said, dear?" asked the girl. "I shan't be in the way?"

"You?" Michael answered. "You are the crown, the only thing that makes it worth while."

They were still discussing the future, when Martin and Deborah broke in an hour later to drag them out to be photographed.

CHAPTER II

ROBERT ORD was seated beneath the cedar tree in his garden, facing his brother-in-law, Dan Palliser. For Palliser he held an admiration from which he never wavered, although the ideas of the two men ran on distinct and rarely meeting lines. His dead wife's brother had always been something of an enigma to him ; he could never analyse the charm that lay behind his queerly chosen mask, the face wherein the magnification of one eye behind a glass compensated a long, angry scar that stretched away from the other to the tip of the left ear. The scar, it was said, had been won in a duel in Paris many years ago ; Daniel accounted himself lucky to have got off so lightly ; " regular spadassin the fellow was," he was apt to say when retelling the story after an expanding dinner—"used to kill his man every time." Even at sixty he maintained the elegance of his youth. The style of a by-gone age that he affected in no way diminished his dapperness. His dressing-room in Mount Street was armed with a fearsome *batterie de toilette*, from the quart bottles of expensive oils and refreshers and the two enormous brushes with which he gentled his decreasing hair, to the noble array of shirts, socks and underclothes and the sets of dumb-bells and Indian clubs with which he kept his

figure trim. "Dan does five miles round his bedroom on his stomach every morning," Robert Ord said, "I wish I had the time." Of his brother-in-law's occupation, he had little knowledge: he never appeared before eleven, was always lunching somewhere or dining somebody, and always to be found at the club between four-thirty and six and from eleven to midnight. He was reputed to be "something in the City," a contemptuous phrase coined by the old Whig aristocracy to denote dubious activities, which by the process of constant usage had come to a respectable connotation. The fact remained that he had amassed enough money to supply what he referred to as his Spartan simplicities, good rooms, good clothes, good food, good company, and was content to take life as he found it. He was not, he confessed, wealthy enough to consider marriage. "I don't think it can be done under £8,000 a year, Robert," he would say, "that is if you want your wife to retain her self respect."

He was at this moment leaning back in his chair, stroking one silk-wrapped ankle, and inhaling with equal pleasure the scent of lavender and of an excellent cigar. Everything was very pleasant, very well done at Salley Bushes, the perfect brick Anne house that his brother-in-law had bought ten years ago. Your room was neither too hot nor too cold; your bath was always right; your food excellent. (What admirable port Robert kept; it would be very long before they would beat the 'nineties or the 'ninety-sixes.) He liked this garden and the view over the Thames valley. The grey river,

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which he could see between the osiers at the foot of the terrace, was to him the embodiment of the unhurrying flow of life ; one wave passes and dies ; another follows ; Robert and he were both near the river mouth ; they would soon flow out into the open sea and be received again into the great fountain's depths. He looked over at his brother-in-law. Something, he knew, was troubling him. Michael ? Martin ? He had known Robert long enough to understand that no confidence would ever be made unless asked for.

" I saw Michael last week with his young woman—had 'em to dinner in fact, and the play."

" What do you think, Dan ? Likely-looking gel, isn't she ? "

" Hm—hm—so-so. Handsome, of course."

" You're not enthusiastic."

" No. You don't want my opinion, Robert, but I'll give it. Silly piece of goods, I thought her—and vain. Silly little peacock, always showing her tail."

" She's young ; she'll grow out of it."

" Maybe, but I think it is rooted. Give it five years, Robert."

" Nonsense. Michael will see to that."

" Mike will be too busy to notice. My nephew is an egotist, Robert. He'll come a cropper."

" Nonsense, Daniel, only youth. All young men are selfish."

" No more than us old 'uns, only it takes 'em different."

" Well, I don't like your point of view, don't agree with it."

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“So,” thought Palliser, “that’s all right ; it isn’t Michael.”

“And Martin ? ” he asked casually. He helped himself to another cigar. Such a day—the August sun was pouring of his richest—was to be enjoyed.

“Ah ! ” returned the father, “Martin. I confess that there I am worried.”

“Third only, I think you told me ? Licked, but not disgraced.”

“The first of our family not to do well.”

“But that is only the public side. What about the inner ? The boy isn’t lazy, or a rotter ? ”

“No ; oh no. Apparently worked very well when he was interested. Drake said he did two papers supremely well, but the rest was too puerile ; apparently hadn’t even troubled to get up the broadest facts. It is heart-breaking. I was taking him into the firm as a counterpoise to Ambrose, a steadying influence ; but it looks as if I had chosen the wrong weight.”

Both men drew meditatively at their cigars. This youngest child of Robert Ord’s was the one to whom both were, in their clumsy way, devoted. For Martin so closely resembled his dead mother that it seemed a reincarnation.

Robert Ord had been twice married. The first time was in the year 1879. He had been on a holiday and when he returned, he had with him a wife, a handsome baggage, the daughter of a small manufacturer in the Midlands, with the brain of a rabbit and the tastes of her environment. To those who knew him as a man silent as the moon on personal matters, it was a surprise that Ord’s

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sensual side had for once overbalanced his judgment. Her reasons for marrying him were obvious, though native shrewdness should have warned her that in anticipating a life of metropolitan pleasure, her reasoning was false. His pleasures were far removed from hers. She soon found herself bored by his friends, and contemptuous of the qualities they prized him for. At gatherings, she had no position unless silent, which she rarely was. Silent, her magnificent physique compelled admiration; loquacious, contempt. After the first gush of physical attraction had diminished to a trickle, he saw his mistake; but unlike the new generation which is kinder—or weaker—than his, he did not trouble to conceal his resentment. He behaved after his kind, cruelly; treated her with frigid politeness, took no pains to hide his ennui. The birth of a son, Ambrose, which occurred in 1881, gave him his opportunity to relegate her to the nursery. Small wonder then that six months later, on a June night, when her husband was celebrating preposterous rites at a City dinner, Jane Ord slipped out of the house and fled to Paris with a small handbag and a younger man. She left no explanation, none of the conventional denunciations; just cut her stick. Robert Ord, after turning the house upside down, went to the police and, in due course, was apprised of his position: but, before the heavy wheels of Divorce Court procedure had groaned through half a costly revolution, Jane resolved the knot by dying in a miserable *auberge* in Lyons. Her husband stayed proceedings and personally fetched the body home for burial. The boy, Am-

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brose, was no problem. At due intervals, he grew from skirts to breeches, from breeches to trousers, passed through school and university, eventually to enter his father's office where he soon displayed a curious knack for finance and an acute business intelligence, which frequently fell foul of his father's older fashioned *Kultur*.

For six years after Jane's death, Ord's life was little but a perpetual self-drugging with labour. Each morning as half-past eight struck, wearing the top hat and morning coat of serious business, he would slam the door of his Kensington house, and grimly stride through the High Street to Kensington Gardens, up the Flower Walk, nodding sardonically at the Prince Consort's gilded back, across Hyde Park to swing himself on to a bus and reach Lincoln's Inn Fields punctually at 9.45. At four o'clock precisely he would leave his office and drive or saunter, usually with a friend, to his club in Piccadilly, where, seated in the bow window, he would watch the leaves in the Green Park sprout, burst, wither and fall, and drink his sherry in the clamour of the cheerful impersonal conversation of that garrulous room. Deeper and deeper he thrust himself within him; rarely an emotion stirred the colour of that fine face, never save on the most impersonal of topics, reached his lips.

It was not until the year 1887, when he had just turned forty, that the miracle occurred. He had gone, that summer, to stay with his old friends, the Scorriers, on a shoot in the wilds of Inverness-shire. At the station where he got out, he found he was to share the wagonette they had sent to meet

him, with a woman ; and a pretty woman, as he could well see. She introduced herself as Henrietta Palliser—later diminished to Harry—to Robert Ord, and the twelve miles to the Scorriers' lodge seemed as one. Though eight-and-twenty, Harry possessed that eager interested air which is a better preservative of youth than the most cunning of cosmetics. She had the knack of making men talk of themselves by patently talking of herself and inviting corroboration. The four weeks at Corrieriach worked a miracle in Robert. When he arrived he was dull, heavy, tired and introspective ; in a fortnight he had lost for ever the withdrawn expression. His eye had become clear, his step light ; he was shooting better than he had ever shot and the daily letters from his office lay unanswered on his dressing-table.

It was during the last week, one evening, when Harry and he were walking down through the policies to see if he could get a fresh trout for dinner from the stream that rustled below the birch wood, that he proposed marriage. The talk had died away between them as they trod over the lengthening shadows. Suddenly, with that formal curtness, almost brusquerie, which was his custom when he had reached a decision, he opened up the idea which he had been nourishing for days past. Looking straight in front of him, he said :

“ Harry, like many other men, I have had the presumption to fall in love with you. You have given me back what I lost a long time ago, the power to come out of myself. I know I am many years older than you, but—will you marry me ? ”

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They both stopped and faced each other, she calm, he with little gusts of emotion puckering over his face. Then she laughed and held out her arms.

“Of course I will. Didn’t you know I wanted you from the first day?”

They never got that trout, but the Scorriers forgave them.

They were married a month later and for the first time since the night Jane Ord slipped from the Kensington house the drawing-room was opened and, on Harry’s command, was repainted, re-decorated and refurnished. The little house became in its way a centre; Robert Ord’s dinners were as good as his father’s; his conversation was entertaining as his wife’s. Odd men were constantly found there, Deacon, Jimmy Cadzow, Bosky the anthropologist, Billiter, that adept epigrammatist who looked like a bruiser, and a dozen more. Robert Ord returned to his work with a new zest, flung himself into his business and took a heavy share in the politics of bookselling.

In 1890, Michael was born, a curious mixture of Ord and Palliser, and two years later Martin, who was pure Harry. Robert Ord was happy with his charming wife and his growing family, but in 1894, while crossing a road, Harry Ord was knocked down by a cart, recklessly driven by a butcher’s boy. She was brought home, but died before her husband, hastily summoned from his office, could reach her side. For the first time in his life, they say, Robert Ord lost his self command. At the inquest he tried to kill the butcher’s boy, and for weeks spoke to none save in tones of brutal sarcasm.

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Further, he took to drink and would come home flushed and incapable to sleep the night out in an arm-chair. Finally it was Daniel Palliser who took him in hand. The following Easter he dragged him abroad and the two men, silent and sympathetic, tramped through the Ardennes, up the Rhine and across south Germany to Vienna, until the demon was exorcised, and Robert Ord returned to his business as if that alone had been his mistress, and his sons. Those weeks forged an unbreakable link between the brothers-in-law. Though they would never admit their sentimentality, they shared an imperishable memory of Henrietta Ord; and frequently a housemaid would find the two men on the staircase at night, having gone to look at the children who bore the image of a woman they had both loved. For Martin, Daniel Palliser had a peculiar tenderness, not only from the likeness to his sister, but because he felt that the boy, deprived so young of the guide that should have been his, had somehow lost, if he had ever found, his way. It was therefore that, at his brother-in-law's last remark, he abandoned his idle pose and leaned forward, pointing his instruction with little darts of his cigar.

"I think you are wrong, Robert. There is a lot of solid, grave stuff in Martin, stuff such as you are built of yourself. There is no levity in him. What he wants is direction, and neither you nor I can give it to him. He is wandering about looking at the peaks and has not yet found the way to scale them—if he even knows which he wants to scale. He will find his way all right—if you only give him time. He is young."

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"Much younger than he ought to be—much younger than you or I were at his age."

Palliser grinned. Recollections of his own twenty-first year were probably very different from those remembered by Robert Ord. The grimace was for Polly Cameron and the rookeries round Comedy Street.

"Does it matter? I don't, by the way, believe that you were ever young yourself, Robert." His brother-in-law looked at him; then chuckled.

"I believe you're right. I got into the business so quickly I never had a chance to be young. Anyhow, he starts with me to-morrow, and with two years under Ambrose, he will probably come out better than I expect."

"Ambrose all right?"

"I suppose so, but he galls me, Dan, my eldest son galls me. He has been at me for three years to let him break out into what he calls general publishing, not the kind of thing I like and, I believe, fundamentally unsound, but I have let him at last. This summer has been the first and now I like it less than ever. Have you seen any of the gross trash bearing our name?"

"Ye-es. I bought a novel the other day, just to see what you were up to. I was rather shocked. I don't associate Wesleyan piety with a dash of cocktail with you."

"That's my noxious daughter-in-law, Sybil. I can't bear the woman. She seems to me to have every defect from overweening vanity, through extreme religiosity down to flagrant indecency. A horrible mixture.

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‘Manners with Fortunes, Humours turn with Climes,
‘Tenets with books, and Principles with Times,’ ”

he quoted, angrily.

A boat grated against the river steps as he spoke, and both men looked up. Martin in shirt and shorts, browned by six weeks of the sun, was getting out of a Canadian canoe. The boy came across the lawn, shading his eyes with his hand to see who was his father’s guest.

“Perfect carriage,” thought the uncle. “Some women will be breaking their hearts for him soon.” And then in a flash: “By Jove, that’s what he needs. *Sic itur ad astra—aut inferna.*”

“Come here and talk to Daniel, Martin, while I finish off my letters,” said his father. Heaving his bulk out of his chair, he walked towards the house with a briskness belying his weight and his years.

Martin flung himself on the turf beside Dan Palliser. After their greeting, the uncle said, “Well, my boy, your father tells me you are joining him? Start to-morrow, eh? Like the idea?”

“Quite well,” said Martin, “but less than I expected to when it was farther off. I wish I’d been trained for something different.”

“Something different? I’d be content with what I could see, especially when it looks all right. You’ll be a partner in three or four years in a tidy little business, good name, tolerable amount of money. Nothing wrong with that, eh?”

“Nothing,” cried Martin. “Just that, Uncle, nothing.” He spread his hands wide, “Nothing.”

“I don’t quite take you,” said the elder.

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"Just that. It's like plunging head-first into a bath of soapsuds and finding no bottom. It isn't based on anything except other people's work."

"Well, most business is like that."

"Not a business that makes things, like steel, or ships, or houses."

"Oh, I see, manufacturing something. Just as risky, my boy."

"Not the risk, not the risk," Martin hit the ground impatiently. "It's the work I want—but I don't know how."

"I think, Martin, if you wait you will find it grow of itself. You're impatient—don't want to wait. Why, my dear boy, you know nothing yet—nothing at all—men and women, pleasures, griefs—any debts, by the way?"

"None, or at least, none that I can't settle. Thanks all the same." Martin understood his uncle's prompting.

"There, you see, not even debts. My poor boy, you haven't begun to come alive yet. Why, I remember when I was three-and-twenty, all the paint was worn off the door of the chambers I used to share with Barrisdale—t'ck, t'ck, he was killed at Modder River—worn off with the kicks of the duns. I used to sit and tremble at the end of the passage and pray that the bolts would hold. In those days, I *had* debts."

"How did you clear them?"

"I never did know exactly how I pulled through. Five pounds here; a bit of luck there, but a youngster could live on next to nothing in town then; by dining out in the evening and by eating bread and

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cheese for lunch. A good life. Fall in love twice a week ; fall out of love as often. Been in love yet ? ’

“ No.”

“ ’Pon my word, Martin, I don’t know what you young men *do* do nowadays. What damned dull lives you must lead. Write poetry ? ”

Martin blushed.

“ Tried to.” He had dropped into the clipped laconic speech of his uncle. “ No good though. Tried to write a poem about that,” he nodded to where Salley Bushes stood in its splendour of white paint and orange brick, each window aflame with the sun. The steps to the garden fell away in gracious curves, the plaster pots winking with blue and yellow flowers. Consciously the house posed for admiration.

“ Bricks and mortar,” growled Daniel. “ Write verses to flesh and blood—you’ll learn more. Now show me the wall garden—I want some things for my little cell in Mount Street.”

On the following morning, Martin was placed in the charge of his brother Ambrose. Ambrose, junior partner in the firm, was twelve years older than Martin, and unlike his two half-brothers in every respect. A square head set above square shoulders displayed most markedly a strong lower jaw, a broad determined mouth, and a high narrow forehead. Good clothes sat on him, not awkwardly, but as if the wearer was too preoccupied ever to pull them quite right. Even more than Michael, he had ambitions. He intended to make the family firm the biggest in London. Already he had fallen

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foul of his father's ideals. Ideals he felt had no place in any business concern. It was a case of fighting to win, to eat the bodies of the fallen and to spare nothing. In his view the firm must either change or die ; and for five years now he had been fighting his father on what he considered the essentials of his existence. At first Mr. Ord had refused him, horrified at the proposals ; but gradually his son's persistence had worn him down, and he allowed Ambrose a certain amount of money to experiment. The experiments were successful and Ambrose had now gained the upper hand of his father. He was, however, tactful and blew no trumpets for his victory. Robert Ord was in these days coming less and less to the office. Many outside affairs engaged a great deal of his time, committees and meetings ; besides he had engaged himself to re-edit Ducange's *Dictionnaire des Moyen Ages*, a long and arduous piece of scholarship, to which he had already given ten years. One day a week alone saw him in Lincoln's Inn Fields, a day for which Ambrose spent the previous evening in tactfully hiding controversial matters. On one point only he failed to break down his father's opposition, that of the firm's employees. At this time, four or five who had been with John Ord during those perilous days forty years before, still held their posts : a number, it was true, were largely sinecures, but their presence irked the new broom. Still, he felt he could afford to wait : he had won on so many points that these minor irritations could be dealt with later. In the meantime, he had consoled himself by installing a good telephone service,

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though nothing would induce his father to part with an elderly mechanism of the 'nineties clamped to the floor in the corner of the room, to reach which he had apparently to stand on his head.

Martin was not more than mildly aware that differences existed between his father and his half-brother. The first revelation occurred on the morning he entered the office. Ambrose greeted him with a sardonic grin. He had observed that his father was really introducing Martin into the firm as a brake on his activities, but he had little doubt that he could sway the still ignorant and pliable youngster into agreement with himself.

"Nothing very much for you, sir," he answered, in reply to his father's inquiry. "A letter here from Cardwell, asking if he can have a bit on account of royalties, as he has the brokers in. He is due for twenty-seven pounds eight and tenpence on September thirtieth, six weeks' time, but I don't like these payments out of time. We shall never know how we stand if we are continually doing this. Besides, Cardwell, as you know, is thoroughly profligate—drinking worse than ever, they tell me."

"That, Ambrose, is a point of view I decline to take. We have no control or right of control over Cardwell's habits of life. As for the principle, it is merely a matter of book-keeping and, in contrast to your theories, we have always made it a matter of principle to help the author. God knows, there was a time when I was glad of their assistance. Let him have twenty-five pounds to-day—to-day, mind you."

Some months later, going over the leaves of an

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old ledger, Martin found entries to certain honoured names, such as "To loan £5" with a contra—"To bad debt £5". He showed it to Ambrose, who growled. "Give the old man his head and he'd run us under out of pure sentiment."

In the meantime, Mr. Ord had been slitting open his private correspondence. At one letter he paused with a frown. He looked up at Ambrose, his face reddening with anger.

"What is this? I have a letter from Dr. Salmon saying his manuscript has been returned and doesn't understand what is wrong. What have you been doing? Why was I not informed?"

Even Ambrose turned pale at this preliminary bombardment.

"I read the manuscript myself, sir, and was sure you would not take it. It dealt with the marriage customs of some islands—I forget exactly where—in the Pacific, I think—very objectionable, I thought, very unpleasant. I was sure you would not . . ."

"You were *sure*, numbskull, you *thought*. How dare you reject the manuscript of a scholar who is also a gentleman without reference to me. Heaven preserve me, I shall choke. Send me in Stokes at once. *You* reject a manuscript. Understand me once and for all, Ambrose, when one of our friends, and by that I mean one of the friends of this house, sends in a manuscript, you do *nothing*, sir, nothing, except give me a report. Send in Stokes at once."

"Very well, sir, but I hardly considered . . ."

"You don't have to consider: you can't: you know nothing. Anything else for me?"

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"Four contracts for signature, the list of accounts due, and the November advertising."

"I will see them all later. Send me in Stokes."

Ambrose made as dignified a withdrawal as was possible with his father fidgeting in his chair, rapping the table with his knuckles. When the clerk appeared, Mr. Ord dictated :

"Dear Salmon,

I have your letter which I did not understand until I had interrogated my young whelp of a son, who apparently keeps what brains he possesses in the part of his anatomy usually reserved for kicks. I have dealt with both and beg you to send me your manuscript at once which we will publish in the spring on the usual terms. Forgive this interlude which is due to my preoccupations with Ducange, and my consequent mismanagement of my business. I shall see you at the Humes' on Wednesday, when I will enlarge upon this matter.

Your old friend,"

"Do that, Stokes, and bring it me for signature soon as ready."

"That is a lesson for you, Martin," he went on. "Ambrose, poor fellow, is a little pig-headed, a little crass. I am pretty sure he gave that book to his starveling wife to read, who is not only abysmally ignorant, but has the worst of nonconformist consciences. They mistake scholarship for pornography, research for Paul-Prying. Ambrose has a fine head for business, I allow, but none, none whatever for literature. He would purge Shakespeare, he would purify Swift, if he had read either of them, which I doubt. He does not understand people

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who use language to reveal. Language was given us, he thinks, to conceal things—hence the kind of novels he publishes. We have never in our existence published a book which we could not conscientiously say was good and decent. But Ambrose at once envisages all the nasty little schoolgirls in London giggling over Salmon's book on primitive religions, without ever dreaming that they will never hear of it, while he's quite happy to publish blindly some of his smutty little novels, which he never reads and which Sybil can't understand. That is why I want you in here, to regulate the balance and to see that the name of Ord is never tainted with these latter-day extravagances."

Michael had passed over to Martin the rooms in Chelsea he had occupied during his vacations before his engagement to Aurea. The excellent stout-hearted and stout-bodied Mrs. Kiggell took complete charge of him, counted his shirts and socks, and informed him it was a quiet street and that Mr. Kiggell was fond of birds, as witness a parrot of Roman aspect and Ciceronian speech. Martin found a pleasant security in the house and transferred his more personal belongings hither from Salley Bushes. He also persuaded Mr. Essex Poole to join him. At first Mr. Poole was rather doubtful; hazarded that for a man of his expectations—he had just begun to eat his Bar dinners—Chelsea was less suitable than Jermyn Street—or Jarmyn, as he preferred to pronounce it. But a glance at Martin's rooms and an admirable dinner decided him. He relinquished his fashionable but exorbitant room, which admitted a gloomy light from a mews, and

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equipped his new lair with the tender souvenirs of his innocent passions, which included an old dancing shoe, alleged by Martin to have been acquired in a raffle.

Martin dined twice with Aurea and Michael. Once at Mrs. Marsh's flat (the mother was discreetly absent) where the girl spent her evening gaily displaying the garments she had bought against the wedding. Flitting to and fro, sometimes fully clad, sometimes in splendid disarray, she seemed quite adorable, and Martin caught something of Michael's enthusiasm. He was however a little disquieted to perceive how firmly his brother lay under the thumb of his enchantress. His dis-ease was increased a week later when they dined together at the Savoy. The girl's beauty obviously attracted the attention of a man at the next table: he continued throughout the meal to gaze at Aurea with lively interest, a fact which the girl noticed with pleasure: she began to shoot sidelong glances at this neighbour. Michael, who had his back to the direction, did not perceive Aurea's distraction which Martin made gallant efforts to conceal. While they were drinking their coffee, Michael told his brother that he had secured the fellowship and had taken a house in Oxford, where they would go at the end of September.

"I shall come down for week-ends," volunteered Martin.

"Do," said Aurea. "Ugh! Oxford in winter. Rough boys and musty dons."

"Oh, come! one of the four enchanted cities," protested Martin.

"Well, I wish you would tell me an enchantment

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for preserving the complexion in it," she replied. "A skin like mine will be ruined in that climate. Michael, you must give it up."

"My dear Aurea," answered Michael coldly, "I have told you I only propose to hold it for a year. But the year is absolutely necessary."

"I suppose you must have your own way," she shrugged. "Still," she added viciously, "you will have to spend it alone for the most part. I can't afford to lose my looks." She rose as she spoke. "I want to powder my nose," she said, "I will meet you in the lounge."

Michael took no notice of this outburst, except to go a little white. Martin glared silently at his plate. The bill was brought and paid, and they got their coats and hats and went to the lounge. As they reached the top of the stairs, they saw Aurea cloaked standing against a pillar, white-faced and furious. Round the side of the pillar, their neighbour at dinner was standing, turned towards her and talking thickly and fast into her ear. As Michael appeared, Aurea swept from the pillar towards her betrothed. "I wish, Michael, when you take me out, you would take care that I am not insulted."

"Get a cab, Martin," said Michael briefly, "and take Aurea." He strode up to Aurea's admirer who was looking at them with a sardonic smile. Before Michael could say a word, he stretched out a hand. "I apologize deeply, in advance, sir," he said. "I ought to have known better. 'Fraid I've dined a bit too well to-night. Please convey my apologies to the lady." At that moment a lift

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door opened, and with a bow and a quiet "good night," the man stepped inside and was sped upwards. It may be mentioned that he murmured to himself as he cut his cigar a few minutes later: "Poor fellow."

Michael joined the others in the cab and at once received a damp and shaken Aurea in his arms. "The beast, Michael, the beast. He was *drunk*—and he said the most abominable things." It took all Michael's time before they got to the Empire to calm the girl. The darkness of the cab prevented his seeing the expression on his brother's face. It took the whole of Mr. Robey's "Mayor of Mudcomedyke" to wipe the grim lines from his face.

They were married in a few days and ran away to France for their honeymoon. Deborah was bridesmaid, Martin best man. Martin took Deborah out to dinner as a reward for so much submission. He gave her his views of the scene a few nights earlier and gloomily prognosticated his brother's future.

"She simply asked for trouble, I tell you," he insisted in reply to Deborah's protest. "She will have to be a good deal more nippy if she wants to play that kind of game."

"Mike will look after himself all right," returned Deborah. "He is interested in nothing but himself."

"You're wrong. That side has been sunk, if not for good, at least for the time being. I suppose it's part of the great gain Dan speaks of as being derived from falling in love."

"Don't you want to fall in love? Don't you

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want to be consumed by a grand passion, Martin ? ” laughed the girl. “ What a ridiculous child it is ! Couldn’t you just let yourself go once, instead of being so solemn—you are growing very melancholy, you know, and then you’ll grow stupid. Wake up ! Fall in love with someone, anyone—me, for instance.”

Martin looked at her. It had never struck him that Deborah was to be loved. As she sat there, impertinent, laughing, smooth-armed, shining-haired, he realized with a jolt that she was extremely attractive ; and he was very fond of her. Did that preclude falling in love ? What more was required ?

“ I’ll think over your offer,” he returned, half-laughingly ; he was puzzled to see a shadow fall across her face. He cursed himself for a clumsy ass : even his laugh did not excuse the rudeness. He tried lamely to make amends. “ You see, I know you so well, Deborah ” (“ Do you, curse your impudence,” she said inwardly) “ that I never thought about it. Besides, neither you nor I want to play.”

“ That’s true,” she admitted. “ Besides, I don’t think I should play up to you.”

They danced the evening out and Martin left her at the door. She stood for a moment in the hall and considered the matter impersonally. “ I like Martin,” she thought, “ he is nice looking ; he has brains ; I’m sure he is loyal. No, I’m not in love with him.” So disposing of the case, she tiptoed up the stairs to bed.

Martin soon forgot all about that conversation.

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He was almost at once plunged into the organized muddle of a publishing house. The book publishing business is one to which all candidates for the Staff College should be apprenticed for a twelvemonth. In no business save that of war, can so many things go wrong in a given twenty-four hours. Ords' had not yet risen to the electric atmosphere of pretended efficiency which they have since borrowed from New York: it was still in its English period of get-there-any-way, butt-end-first, but get there. So it worked with the encouraging clumsiness and noise of the skittle alley of Hudson's ghostly sailors. It had been decided that Martin must be instructed in every activity of the house, and his first week was therefore spent under the tutelage of the young Barbarossa who ruled the packing-room, a herculean youth of seventeen, by name Prabble. His immediate task was the packing of some hundred copies of a large two volume history weighing about twelve pounds. At the end of three hours, he was hot, dishevelled, dirty, had broken two finger nails and half dislocated a toe beneath a cascade of volumes. He was faced by what seemed still the greater part of the pile and an unedifying group of young mummies, resembling the parcels in which parents send the corpses of their unwanted brats to unknown destinations. At this moment, he was joined by the superhuman Prabble.

"Gosh me!" ejaculated the new-comer. "What the 'ell 'ave you been doing, mate? I never saw such a bundle o' muck in all my life. 'Ow d'yer think I can send that to 'Atchards? W'y it 'ould ruin my reputation all over the City of London."

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'Ere you two, Carfrae and Bags, just get to work on this pile and put it right—and you ” (to Martin) “ come along o’ me.”

He withdrew the humiliated learner behind a pile of books, where he proceeded to instruct him in the art of making a parcel neatly and economically.

“ There’s w’ys and w’ys,” he remarked, “ and I don’t say as ’ow this is the best, but it looks like it. Yer see, if I did it your w’y, I’d be up before the old devil—begging your pardon—Mr. Ord, that is, and ’e’d want to know what the ’ell I meant by wasting three reams o’ paper on five quids’ worth of books. But don’t take it to ’eart so, you’ll learn : you’ll learn.”

Martin found that the discipline of the packing-room was completely Prussian. After witnessing the scientific knocking together of the heads of two of the delivery boys, he received from the executioner a long explanation, ending in : “ if I didn’t do it, the firm ’ud go smash. Anyhow, I’ve informed Mr. Ambrose and it’s ’is responsibility. If ’e don’t like it, I shall ’ave to ’and in my resignation. P’raps I’ll retire. A nice little vegetable barrer down Brewer Street, that’s my mark.” He sighed like a regimental sergeant-major hankering for the charms of a small public-house. Martin picked up a copy of Stagg on Astrodynamics. “ D’you read? ” he asked innocently.

“ Me ? Read ? ’Ave I got the time to read with Simpkins, Smith and Boots bothering me all day long ? Besides, what’s the good ? If I took a book ’ome, the oldun ’ould pinch it and pop it for the price of a pint. ’E’s a queer one, my old dad. Last

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Saturday, he'd been on the booze round at the Royal Pair, and when 'e come out, 'e'd fair copped the brewer, fell over in the gutter and only gets 'ome by 'and work along the railings. Then 'e finds 'e's lorst 'arf 'is week's takings, and 'e fair raised 'ell, went for the kitchen table with a chopper and knocked off a couple of legs. Then, if you please, 'e comes over to me and asks me to fork up. I just waved my 'and at 'im. So there's no food at 'ome this week and 'e 'as to go out wivout 'is breafus in the morning. Laugh! I 'aven't laughed so much for years."

Later, Prabble explained his girl to Martin, a small, grave, grey-eyed slip whom Martin sometimes found waiting at the end of the Square when he left the office in the evening. His "steady," Prabble admitted: a good girl, quiet, saved money. They had quarrelled not so long before on a question of extravagance. He had taken her to the Canterbury and insisted that they should occupy the sixpenny seats, which she regarded as reckless. "But, after all," he explained, "yer've got to 'ave some self-respect. Can't go tiking a young girl to the four-penny seats. It looks as if yer couldn't afford to 'ave a girl."

After ten days of mastering the infernal art of folding corrugated paper and ravelling unloosable knots, without either getting hot or ruining a valuable book, Martin was reported to Ambrose as efficient: or, as Prabble preferred to put it—

"'E's all right. I can't teach 'im any more."

Ambrose grinned as he retailed this testimonial to Martin. "Next week, trade counter, I think,

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so that you can learn something of the brighter side of publishing."

The trade counter of the offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields was a peculiar erection, designed in some far off day by Robert Ord. It was a long counter with a swing flap at one end, but divided by a partition in the middle like an old-fashioned pawnbroker's. One side bore a brass plate labelled "TRADE," the letters almost worn away by the constant brushing of the sleeves and sacks of the collectors. The presiding genius over this monument to stability was Albert Ponsonby, who had been secretary to two generations of Ords, but now with the increased distribution of that infernal machine-gun, the typewriter, an instrument which at the age of sixty-six, he very properly refused to acknowledge, had retired before modern methods. He had, however, displayed such signs of misery at the suggestion that he should be pensioned and sever his connexion of fifty years' standing with the firm, that Mr. Ord had placed him in his present position. Martin was therefore entrusted to the experience of Albert—for as Albert he was known throughout the office, the noble patronymic of Ponsonby being assumed only beyond the railings. Albert, though less brusque than Prabble, was equally instructive.

"There, there, so you're coming to me, Mr. Martin: you'll be the fifth Mr. Ord I've worked with. Oh Lord, oh Lord, two and fifty years . . ."

The door swung open, a collector banged in, slapped his sack on the counter, wetted his thumb and began reading in a monotonous voice "*Nicholas Nickleby* not more than sixpence, anything? *Seventy*

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Years in Darkest Africa, anything? *Little Poll and the Pink Parrot*, anything? *Introduction to Dynamics*, anything? Nothing, thank you—good morning.” Slap, bang, crash.

“Rude fellow that,” flowed on Albert, “but means well. Not surprised he’s in a temper, they work them cruelly hard, some of them. So your Pappy’s sent you to me, has he?” Another crash: same pantomime. “Yes, we do that. Ten and six. One copy? That will be seven and eleven. Now, now, now, *you* know it won’t go down. No booking under ten shillings, I’ve told you half a dozen times. Got no money? Well, go back to Mr. Wilson and tell him Albert said it was a shame to send a fine strapping lad like you out with only his bus fares.”

“*Ivory ipes*? I don’t know it. Show me your book—oh! *Ivory, Apes and Peacocks*: that is not ours. Go away, young man. This is a serious business.”

The other door swung open, admitting the portly presence of a successful author. “Good morning, Mr. Caudle, good morning. I don’t know if Mr. Ord is free, but I’ll see. Yes, sir, free he is. Go straight up, Mr. Caudle, first door on the right.”

“Yes,” he said turning to Martin, “many’s the famous man we have had in here. I can just remember Charles Dickens—the year he died—that’ll take you back, and Mr. George Meredith. ‘Do you read my books, Albert?’ he once asked me. Well, I had tried one—‘One of our Conquerors,’ I think it was called, so I said ‘Oh, yes, Mr. Meredith.’ ‘And what do you think of them, eh?’ No, don’t tell me, I know. Damned tom-

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foolery.' Very freespoken was Mr. Meredith in his day."

Gradually Martin passed from department to department, acquiring a little from each. Last of all, he was let in on Mr. Quarles, the permanent reader to the firm and its last oddity. Horatio Quarles was a thin little man with a long violet nose and a fluting voice. He had been in his day a brilliant scholar: he had taken Orders, and a dazzling career in the Church was predicted for him. Unhappily, before he was appointed to a curacy, he had received an offer to tutor the son of a millionaire and accepted it. For four years he travelled the world with his pupil, a young man of no qualification, but of exceptional thirst. For one year Horatio Quarles battled with his charge; in the second, he disapproved; in the third, he allowed himself to be persuaded; in the last, the seven devils had entered into possession; the Rev. Horatio Quarles was no more. For some years, he sank lower; proof reading and the writing of an occasional text book kept him from the worst, and then, luckily for him, a small brochure, written under the influence of a newly discovered stimulant, fell into Robert Ord's hands. He sought out the writer in his miserable attic in Seven Dials, fought with him and won. In three months Mr. Quarles was established in his dusty little room on the top floor at Lincoln's Inn Fields in the capacity of editor, adviser and reader of manuscripts. After two excursions into the abyss, he was so terrorized by his saviour that he succeeded in giving up liquor for ever. Sober, he grew clean. Clean, he recovered

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his self-respect. He took to concocting various text books which Ord published and which, becoming staple food to the public and secondary schools, assured him an improved income. Now he sat daily from ten to four, correcting, reading and writing. His long nose and thin hedge of bristling hairs gave him the air of a bird with serious suspicions of a piece of food as he turned the leaves of a manuscript. He had been much distressed by certain of the books that Ambrose had published and never hesitated to tell him exactly how and why they had failed, when they did. On the other hand, two novelists whom he had "discovered" had turned out winners; and the junior partner was far too interested in success to bother to feel resentment at this odd employee's triumph. Instead, he trusted him.

Martin found the work tedious. Day after day, he would be faced by an ever growing pile of typescript which, labour as he might, he could not reduce. And each manuscript he read seemed to him more depressing than the one before. He began to lose heart; then, he felt, to lose his judgment, and with it all his faculties. One afternoon in the middle of a morbid sex novel (these years, you will recall, were the days of great and serious earnestness about matters of sex—"sincere" was the catchword) he looked wildly up and caught Mr. Quarles's eye. Mr. Quarles was just closing a blue folder which he had opened some ten minutes earlier and placing a rejection slip between its leaves.

"Do you mean to say you've read that in ten minutes?" demanded Martin testily.

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Mr. Quarles smiled benignantly.

"Oh, dear me, no. It was a very genuine, and I might say, energetic little story by a nice young girl. Bating the improbability of the plot, which was conceived on one of the higher planes of society, a disregard of the foundation of grammar, and a deal of ill-spelled French, it was not a bad book, but not for us, I think : no, decidedly not for us. One of the younger publishers will like it, I am sure. The author moves in quite respectable circles. But we still maintain a certain respect for literature. Did I read it ? Twenty or thirty pages, I suppose. It was enough.

"You see, my dear boy," he went on, warming to his theme, "every publishing house must be allowed its little prejudices. Ours is in favour of grammar, and grammar, as Owen Seaman says 'takes years to learn.' Others, no doubt, are not debarred by such considerations. And then I have my own prejudices—I tell you this in the strictest confidence, of course. My own particular is against peasant stories, especially those laid in Devonshire and Cornwall. Cornwall I have been told is a very beautiful county with a very beautiful coast. So far as I am concerned, I do not believe it. I once spent ten dismal days of winds and rain looking at a crevasse between gloomy rocks, mournful waves, and the gulls. . . . Never did I think I could grow to hate birds with quite so consuming and passionate a rage. I fled. My prejudice remained unshaken. For Sussex, too, I have a rooted abhorrence. The mere recollection that the county has been celebrated by Mr. Beauchamp—that vociferous pedes-

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trian tun—has turned whatever light falls upon Sussex to Cimmerian darkness so far as I am concerned. Let the natives of that region sing of their county even in the accents of Pindar, I shall be deaf.”

He waved a hand and seated himself once more behind a pile of typescript, but popped his head up a moment later to add :

“A prejudice, my dear Martin ; find yourself a good, healthy, unreasonable prejudice. There is no finer company in this world. It saves time, I can assure you, and is, as it has always been, the armour of the very great. Even the Almighty, if He will forgive me for saying so, has had His prejudices. Otherwise, I can conceive no decent reason for His choice of that ineffable rascal, King David.”

“Even, armed with your prejudice, I don’t see how you retain your eye or your ear, when you read this kind of muck day after day.”

“That, of course, is your error. I don’t read. I have, as you may have observed a nose.” He cocked his head on one side and looked down the organ in question. “A fine nose ; a beauty ; if you will forgive the quip, a Wellingtonia. That is my guide, my oracle. I can *smell a writer*, sir, smell him at ten paces. And my nose’s judgment has been fortified by success ; it becomes keener each day. Show me the stuff and my nose will tell you whether it is tasty or high, green, ripe, or rotten. Of course, it is not impeccable. I am, during the winter months, occasionally subject to colds and though it has never yet deceived me as to a bad book, it is possible it has not always discovered the

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finer fragrances of some inglorious Milton, who has therefore, owing to the climate, had perforce to remain silent—or to seek another publisher. For the persistence of these authors, my dear boy, is without parallel since the days of the great church persecutions. They even forget themselves so far as to send me enclosed in their manuscripts the rejection slips of other publishers, tokens, as it were, of good faith and of its genuineness as literature.”

Those homilies of Mr. Quarles kept Martin's spirits up during the winter. He laboured manfully and even went to the length of taking work home, and seeking the advice of Essex Poole, whose virgin mind he thought might discover a masterpiece where his tired brain could find no virtue: but he found that his friend's monosyllabic expletives, as a rule, confirmed his suspicions, while his tendency to quote passages of the most emotional nature disturbed the atmosphere of the house to such an extent that he desisted. During his period of study, Mr. Poole had sought diversion in the picture galleries of London. Burning to be a patron of the arts, he had purchased a large, heavily framed picture of a Jewish damsel of cubish figure, who, naked to the waist, gazed fixedly across a coffee cup. Intensely pleased, Essex Poole insisted on hanging it in the dining-room. The job was finished in the small hours.

“Looks pretty awful,” said Martin, “more like an advertisement for Kardomah Cafés than decoration to a gentleman's dining-room. Wonder what Mrs. Kiggell will think?”

“Pooh! My dear fellow, she will be delighted.

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It is a masterpiece ; one of the coming men. It lends the room an air."

"It certainly is festive, but I don't feel Mrs. K. will exactly approve."

The following evening the wall was bare. Mr. Poole was very low.

"Hell of a row," he disclosed in whispers to Martin after dinner. "Apparently it was visible from the street, and when a crowd of twenty errand boys gathered outside the window, making extremely personal comments on the lady's figure, old Kiggell came up with an ultimatum. I tried to convert him to an enthusiasm for Gulbenkian's art, but he remained unconvinced, positively morbid. He kept repeating in a mournful voice—'It's a quiet street, sir. We haven't had anything like this before, anything, if you'll forgive me, *disreputable* about the house. And Mrs. Kiggell, she has hardly stopped blushing all day, what with the things those little varmint's have been shouting outside. And the police came too ; and what they said I hardly like to repeat. No, sir, go it must.' So I have had to take it to the bathroom."

Martin spent the winter months partly with Mr. Quarles, partly under Horwood, the manufacturing expert, a red-faced, brusque person, always worried, perpetually telephoning to printers and binders. This department fascinated him. He liked watching the building up of a book, the selection of types, the specimen pages, the dummy cloth cards, the choice of processes for illustration, and the thousand odd details that go to the make-up of a book. He found he was spending more and more time in

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Horwood's room and began to want to find out more of this fascinating technique. He mentioned this to Ambrose one night when he dined with him at his ugly mansion in Hampstead. He had come here, simply because he had no quick enough excuse to postpone Ambrose's invitation. Like all the Ords, he detested Sybil. She was the only daughter of a popular Congregational preacher and of his extremely wealthy wife : and she had had the good fortune to inherit a great deal of money. She was, on the other hand, an extremely good wife for Ambrose. She had understood his ambitions and set herself to further them. Thinking that as a publisher's wife, she ought to shine intellectually, she had for years attended every kind of knowledge-while-you-wait lecture. In this way, she too had acquired a smattering of learning and a vocabulary of catchwords, with which she was quite capable of taking on and defeating the most erudite of scholars. Her tactics were Parthian : and her skill in changing the ground of battle so swift that one eminent philologist was heard to say—"Under the influence of Ord's port and Mrs. Ord's dialectics, I came away with a disordered but convinced impression that Homer was written by the late W. E. Gladstone and that the Liberal candidate for Huddersfield will compose Shakespeare's plays, as soon as he is elevated to the Papacy."

Martin found himself assailed as soon as he had drunk his soup. On this occasion, having dilated on the vulgarity and wickedness of Mr. Wells, Sybil fastened on to a nearer and less theoretical topic, her father-in-law.

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"You must realize he is getting old. He certainly struck me as being almost feeble when I saw him a few weeks ago. I tried to talk to him about his beloved dictionary, but he was so vague and seemed so uninterested that I gave it up." Martin grinned at the thought of his father unburdening himself of his most cherished Ducange to the egregious Sybil.

"I hadn't noticed any change," he answered. "When I was down on Sunday, he seemed as vigorous as usual. He walked me ten long miles, at least."

"Oh, yes. His body is all right. It is his mind I am afraid for. And then he is so conservative, though he calls himself a Liberal. He resists every change, every improvement at the office. Ambrose has positively to fight him over every single thing he does to save money. Father positively squanders it."

"Oh sharper than the serpent's tooth to have a spendthrift Pa," misquoted Martin. "After all, Sybil, it is still his business."

"Only partly ; remember Ambrose has a share."

After she had left the room, Ambrose took up the topic again.

"Of course Sybil exaggerates, but there is a certain amount in what she says. The Governor is getting on. He will be sixty-six next birthday and he sticks to his old habits. What was good enough for him should be good enough for us. He doesn't realize that the world is changing and that money has different values now from what it had in 1877. One can't stand still in this business : one

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must either grow or die. And remember too, there was only one of him ; there will be three of us to batten on the firm. The day of those old easy-going firms is past. All sorts of new people are cropping up. If we don't extend, we shall be out in ten years. For one thing, we can't, we can't afford to go on subsidizing Tom, Dick and Harry, because they are old friends of our father. Do you know what there was outstanding in the way of bad debts of that character when I made him form the company three years ago ? Three thousand, four hundred and forty-three pounds—and every penny had to be written off."

Martin felt that there was justice in Ambrose's complaints. His few months in the office had shown him not a little of the constant strain that was pulling the firm in two directions ; on the one side the younger group headed by Ambrose ; on the other his father's passive resistance, to which was added all the weight of custom as followed by the old employees. Against his will he had realized that his father was often wrong, and that, though Mr. Ord would never have seen it, he was employing exactly the same tactics against his son that his uncles had employed against him. Fortunately open war had been masked by the senior's long absences from the office and by the increasing mortality among the friends and authors who were his contemporaries. Martin was aware that Ambrose planned a gradual ascendancy in Lincoln's Inn Fields, but of how far he had got and how soon he would achieve it, he was still in the dark. In reply to his brother's inquiries as to how he was getting

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on and what he was learning, he unconsciously let be seen the direction to which his fancy was turning. Warming under the influence of his brother's port, he began to venture small suggestions which had formed in his mind, improvements, economies. Ambrose nodded as he listened. He did not look at his brother, he seemed to be concentrating on an affair hidden in the comb of a pineapple. Suddenly, he moved, rapped his hand on the table, and said :

"Yes : you have it, Martin. Listen. We are going to increase. Next year I'm going to bring in fresh capital. It will mean increased output all round. I think I can see a way to save what we spend quicker than I anticipated. I want you to suggest to the Governor that you take six months in a printing works—or nine, or a year—just so long as it will take you to know the thing from beginning to end. And at the same time learn all you can about paper, binding and all the other technical business. No. I'm not going to tell you exactly what is in my mind. I hardly know myself yet. You will have to trust me. Will you do it ? "

Martin laughed. At last he saw something solid to put his foot on.

"Rather," he said. "Father won't object, will he ? "

"Not he. It was always one of his own private side-lines—only don't you make it a side-line ; that is what our father has had too many of."

Martin went down to Salley Bushes for the next week-end, and laid the suggestion before his father. Robert Ord heard him out, and then said :

"I agree. Ambrose is right for a wonder. And

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thank God you have found something you want to do, Martin. I was beginning to dread that lack of enthusiasm, that ataraxia of yours. I will write to my old friend, Ormiston, to-morrow. I dare say he would take you in for my sake. Now come and help me over some of these notes."

He swept Martin before him into the library. Four hours of searching, of reference and counter reference, of climbing the ladder, of blowing dust from rarely touched volumes, of dirtying of collars and hands were rewarded by the establishment of a minute point in the insignia of mediæval heralds. He left his father to record it in his large, clear hand. "No one can write nowadays," Mr. Ord was apt to lament, when he was forced to sign a typewritten letter. Sleepily, Martin climbed the stairs, stopping at intervals to yawn and admire the grotesque shadow he cast on the walls. Surely now the rose would open.

CHAPTER III

MARTIN went into Ormiston's works in January, 1914. He paid a farewell visit to Mr. Quarles, who congratulated him.

" . . . Though I shall personally suffer from lack of your presence. I have always thought, my dear Martin, that the part of Martha has been unduly minimized. After all, we do prefer a clean kitchen. Meanwhile, I shall continue in the service of Mary. You feel no hankerings after literature? " He displayed a manuscript. " This is an unusually succulent piece of writing—I fancy the author must have dredged Murray for adjectives. You are not tempted? Well, well—perhaps you are right. Language, we are told, was given us to express our thoughts. It is a pity I sometimes feel that bountiful providence did not give us an equivalent automatic machinery to suppress them."

Ormiston's works were situated in the heart of Soho, and were typical of very few printing works. For James Ormiston, a contemporary of Martin's father, was a faddist, or a visionary. He was one of the first to realize the benefits of light and air, had destroyed the old ramshackle building which had served his firm for seventy years, and, with the aid of a young and enthusiastic architect, had replaced it with a clean, sound and sanitary build-

ing. Half his life was spent in seeking improvements, bettering his machines, introducing new processes, which he sought in Germany and Paris, and running the business rather as an experiment than as a profit-making affair. As an example, his ink made from his own recipe was better than most, and the machine men were never stinted in such a way that grey pages appeared towards the end of a job. He said it paid him ; and it may be so, since when he died, his estate ran well into six figures. His enthusiasm for his craft infected Martin from the first day he presented himself in Gerrard Street. James Ormiston, his long nose quivering with pleasure, led him round the building in person; stood in the middle of a battery of monotype machines and shouted explanations above the rafale ; drew him into the casting room and waved his arms over the *chunk-chunk* of the unpleasantly human contrivances; talked for an hour against the seethe and drone of the printing machines, and, in the paper store, expatiated at length, producing samples and showing the puzzled pupil the how, why and wherefore from the tightest woven linen rag to the lowest news pulp. It was not until three o'clock that he took Martin out to lunch, during which he delivered the entrancing monologue of the expert, and later placed him in the hands of the foreman compositor, anxious, but fired with something of the master's curiosity.

A fortnight later, Martin, flushed with pride at having his conception of the title-page to Pass's "Economics" accepted, journeyed to Oxford to stay with Aurea and Michael. Aurea welcomed

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him very charmingly at their small house in North Oxford and won his heart by feeding him with anchovy toast of the kind that is—or used to be—made in no other place in the world. Michael arrived towards the close of this orgy, having been playing rackets, and at once departed for a bath where he could be heard making a healthy, unmelodious noise.

“You know we are going to come to London soon?” asked Aurea.

“Mike used to talk vaguely of going to the Bar in the autumn.”

“It will be sooner. Mike has resigned at the end of this term.”

“Good Lord, why?”

“I think he thought he was wasting time here. You know, Martin, Oxford is a very dull place—terribly provincial—dreadfully dull dinner parties. And the fellows’ wives too! Discussions about servants, food, babies—it is so boring.”

“Yes, but what about Mike? I thought he had a thesis to finish.”

“Poor boy, he gets no time. No, we shall be happier in London.”

Later in the evening, when Aurea had gone to bed, Martin asked his brother: “Aurea says that you have resigned?”

Mike looked at him a little greyly, and said: “Yes. Did she tell you why?”

“She said you thought you were wasting time here and that the place was very dull.”

“Oh, she did, did she?” said Michael disagreeably. “But that is only part of the reason. She is

the other part herself. No, I won't blame her. She is quite right. Oxford is a dull place for a married girl, especially for someone like Aurea who has been about a great deal. The final calamity occurred only the other day. Old Hummel, the Master, objects to young dons being married. He decided privately at the end of last term to take it out of me—especially after Aurea snubbed him at dinner. So under the guise of doing me a great favour, he has appointed me Junior Dean next term. Do you understand ? ”

“ No. ”

“ It means that for the whole term I have to sleep in College every night. Nice man, eh ? My riposte was to resign. Don't you agree ? ”

“ But Michael, what's going to happen to you ? Have you finished your book ? ”

“ Good God, no ! I couldn't have finished before the end of the year. It will have to wait until some more seasonable time—a decade, may be, or until I become a cabinet minister and can hire a ghost. No, we shall take a flat in town, and I shall go to the Bar. Luckily Carrick can find room for me at once. It is earlier than I wanted it ; the fact that my book is unfinished means the loss of that much reputation and, of course, I lose the money I am making here, and have to spend a deal more. Still, it can't be helped, and perhaps it will turn out more favourably than it looks. Have a drink ? ”

While he was pouring out a drink, Martin made a rapid stocktaking of his brother. Michael was thinner, and, in spite of his youth, wearied. He felt that behind his brother's easy exposition of the

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situation, some other difficulty had forced him to acquiesce in this quick surrender of his careful scheme. He began to question Michael about his work, his life, his book and his amusements and gradually became convinced that, so far as Oxford and his college was concerned, he was perfectly happy, while, as for money, Michael had enough for any normal pursuit that he and Aurea might care to undertake ; though they were not wealthy, they had enough. At the back of his mind Martin came to the conclusion that it was Aurea and not Michael who actually desired the removal, but he did not dare to challenge his brother on the matter. Cautiously he tried to get nearer to the subject by saying that Aurea looked well.

"Beautiful," corrected Mike, absently.

"I said—well."

"Oh yes, her health's all right, but what is much more important, my solemn brother, she is very beautiful, very attractive, and what is more, she is very clever and tactful. If it had not been for her, I should never have seen the catch in old Hummel's appointment, and had the guts to refuse and get out."

At which Martin nearly bit through his pipe stem with dismay and wildly upset his whisky to prevent his brother noticing his confusion. When he had recovered sufficiently and apologized, he turned to indifferent subjects until they went to bed.

On the following morning, Aurea took him for a walk in the parks. The chill of the February morning brought a charming flush to Aurea's cheeks,

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but Martin was impervious to any agreeable emotion. He began bluntly—"I don't think it was at all wise for Mike to resign so soon after his appointment, you know."

His sister-in-law shrugged her shoulders. "My dear Martin, what else could he do? He would have got nothing out of the College, and the appointment was neither more nor less than an unpardonable insult to both of us. After all, I am entitled, as his wife, to some consideration. I am, I believe, sufficiently attractive for even an elderly dotard like the Master to infer that Michael might sometimes care to sleep at home. It was a deliberate attack on me." She drew her furs closer round her and shivered. "Anyhow they know now that they can't deal with me quite as tyrannically as they can with a boy like Michael." Her averted head and shoulder showed that she was irritated, but Martin pushed his end.

"He might have refused the appointment?"

Aurea turned round on him and stamped her foot.

"Don't you see that he could not? The offer was enough, the deliberate attempt to defeat me. Michael certainly felt it was that as much as I did, and he would not permit it . . . Martin, you really are interfering very unnecessarily in what is Michael's and my business. I suppose I shall have to put up with it: all families are alike to intruders . . . but I had hoped that you, whom Michael has always been so near to, would be different, that you, at least, would see . . ."

She broke off and looked at him pitifully; her

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eyes glistened. Martin, guiltily feeling that he had overstepped the limit of discretion, surrendered.

"All right, Aurea, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interfere. Only I would like to see Michael going ahead as he intended. There, I won't say another word."

They tramped on, and in a few minutes Aurea had recovered her spirits and was giving a feline portrait of one of the senior fellows.

Martin dismally reviewed the whole matter in the train that night. If Michael was to be dragged at the wheels of Aurea's chariot, it was a miserable end, especially if he, as he seemed to do, took pleasure in it. Perhaps, on the other hand, the return to London might prove a success, but it would take two years at least to know, and meanwhile . . . "Oh, hell!" he said savagely, and turned to his paper.

Some days later, Martin discussed what he considered his brother's troubles with Deborah.

"I don't see why Aurea should play second fiddle to Mike, any more than he should to her," she retorted to his complaint. "She is just as much a person as he is."

Martin shook his head. "Someone has got to lead in that home and Mike is naturally, and by his achievements, the person."

"Don't talk to me about his achievements," she flashed, "as if a fellow of Hereford was a kind of Prime Minister."

"It's something on the way—and what has Aurea done?"

"She does not need to do. She *is*; she has a

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personality—and the fact that she has made her husband give up something proves it.”

Martin ruminated.

“Can’t a man be a good lover without sacrificing his career?”

“Martin, you make me impatient. All I’m trying to make you see is that Aurea wins deservedly because she has the stronger character.”

“Or the more selfish. Mike’s hopelessly in love with her.”

“And she with him—but she sees clearer.”

Martin gave a gesture of despair.

“I don’t believe she really cares a damn for Mike. She is just as ambitious and only cares for what he will become.”

“Oh, you have just got a theory, Martin, and stick to it. Besides, if Mike is happy, what does it matter? Now I must fly, or I shall be late for dinner.”

Martin had been giving Deborah tea in a café near the works. He was working late, as he had taken to doing. Very often, he would dine about nine at the club to which Daniel Palliser had procured his brother’s and his election, and then having read the papers, walk home to Chelsea and drop fast asleep. On other nights, when he was later, a coffee-stall would provide him with sausage rolls and, black handed with oil and ink, he would slink back to his rooms and bed, avoiding, if possible, his artistic neighbour. Frequently, however, Essex Poole who, under the influence of London, was growing into an elderly *viveur*, would insist on waking him at two or three in the morning to discourse

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on the merits of some particular vintage he had sampled that night, or the unexampled excellence of so-and-so's cook. One night he met Dan Palliser at the house of a famous K.C. notable for his table. Slightly intoxicated, he came back and sat on Martin's bed.

"I say, I met your uncle this evening. Such a chap, just like my old father. He came and sat next to me after the women had gone. I asked him what he thought of old France's brandy. He smelt it twice, tried it and said: 'Negligible, but not vicious.' We must get the two old boys down here and give 'em a dinner. Mrs. K. could give them a thing or two they don't know, what?"

Martin agreed drowsily.

"He likes you, you know," went on the remorseless Essex. "Thinks quite a lot of you. So does your cousin, Miss Dare."

"What did she say?" groaned Martin.

"Oh, I don't know—lot of nice things. Pretty girl that, got brains, though she frightens me to death the way she looks at you with those large eyes of hers. You ought to marry her, Martin. Topping idea, what?"

"Can't," mumbled the victim. "First cousins. Go away, Essex. I'm dead tired, and got to be at the works at eight. Do go to bed; there's a good fellow."

"All right, my beauty. See you in the morning."

Martin closed his eyes as the door was gently shut. Poole's casual suggestion flickered to and fro in his brain. Marry Deborah; it was a silly idea; but why not? He tried to explore the un-

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conscious part of his mind to find the point which should lie close enough to hers for that quick spark to be born and snap between them. He could not find it. If it existed, it was insulated by tightly packed wads of familiar things. Perhaps the familiar things were the nucleus, only waiting to be welded by some as yet unknown heat of emotion : but it was not there. He had nothing for Deborah more than a solid affection to help her should she ever require it ; no longing to possess stirred in him. The light kiss exchanged in his Oxford rooms hinted nothing more than the kisses of children in trouble, a comforting gesture. He tossed and tried the matter over from her side ; but that, he soon concluded, was silly. No : he was not in love with Deborah, nor she with him. They met, they danced, they were good friends, and nothing else had hampered or tainted their intimacy. Besides he must work now : that was more important. He knew he was learning fast, and with each obstacle mastered, a hunger for further knowledge pushed him forward to the exclusion of all other passions. He slid down the slope of his thoughts until drowsily he dreamed of a vast printing machine slogging over a representation of Deborah's features which he tried in vain to snatch away.

The summer months brought an easing off in the factory. Martin had more opportunities to leave Soho earlier, to dine out now and again, to dance. He dined one night at Roderick Dare's—he was to take Deborah on to a dance later. Ambrose was also dining : he wanted to take his host's advice on certain legal business. He took Martin aside for a

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moment in the drawing-room and asked how he was getting on.

"Do you think that with a trustworthy manager you could run a small plant of your own?"

Martin shook his head.

"Not yet. I know a lot, but not enough. There's the paper side, you know, costing and so on. I'm getting the hang of it, but I shall need another three or four months."

"October?"

"Yes, if nothing interrupts. You seem very anxious about it, Brose."

"I am. I'm going to want you, Nipper." He smiled one of his stiff smiles, as he used the name Martin had been called as a child. "Listen. I've had a long talk with the Governor, and I have persuaded him—or at least half persuaded him—to buy up a small printing works on the Surrey side, and to increase the company's capital to the necessary amount. Don't say a word about it yet. I'm sure it is a good bid—and it is only the beginning."

At dinner the conversation turned on to general topics, Disestablishment, Home Rule. Roderick Dare, a thin cool Tory barrister in the House, enunciated his antipathy to the Liberal party and to Ireland.

"I don't know which I dislike most, the Liberal rabble, or foaming Carson and his vulgar galloper. A nice thing at this stage of the Constitution to have two fanatical gangs breeding civil war, seducing the soldiery, and importing arms at every blessed little bay round the coast."

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"We have promised them Home Rule for forty years," withstood Ambrose.

"Exactly what all my political friends say. How like politicians. Because that ancient villain, the G.O.M., had a bee in his bonnet forty years ago, all the Radicals think it is a holy insect and ought to be kept alive. Just like a lot of musty fakirs."

"Political principle, isn't it, to keep your promises?"

"My dear Ambrose, political principles are only made to be worn out. They are the creation of enthusiasts. In ten or fifteen years everybody thinks the same thing. In thirty everyone thinks them old-fashioned."

"They seem fashionable enough at the moment. The City is very rocky: everything jumping about at sixes and sevens, and money is tight. It's your friends, Roderick, who are making the trouble."

"Of course they are. It is the privilege of His Majesty's Opposition to make trouble whether they break the country or not. It is an axiom of Parliamentary government since the days of Charles the First. It is not surprising that they always break the best man—Chatham, Pitt, Castlereagh, Peel. Fortunately the law of libel is more stringent than sixty years ago, or they might possibly break me for my unguarded moments."

"That reminds me, Ambrose," put in Mrs. Dare from the other end. "Didn't you publish Stephen Retallick's diaries a few weeks ago? Yes? I thought so. He treats Lord Armisdale very cavalierly about his Gobi exploration."

Ambrose turned to her, frowning.

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"Armisdale? The man who had such a row at the Royal Society some years ago? What does Retallick say?"

"Haven't you read it yourself?" asked Mrs. Dare innocently.

"My dear Fanny," Ambrose replied, slightly nettled, "haven't you heard the quip—'Publishers are all illiterate men with no manners.' When I read books, I prefer them to have been published by someone other than myself. But what does Retallick say?"

"Oh, it is too long to tell you in full, but he practically says that Armisdale never went near the Gobi at all, that he followed the way Armisdale said he went and found he was wrong in every particular. It goes on for days and days. You must read it yourself. Deborah, run up to the drawing-room, and get it for me. It is on the table by the centre window."

"Don't you have a legal fellow to vet your stuff?" asked Roderick.

"Good God, no! We haven't the time. Quarles, our reader, looks after that, though he is not a lawyer. Page 340, did you say, Fanny?" as Deborah came back with the book. He adjusted his pince-nez and swiftly read the pages. "What, do you think, Roderick? I must say it looks pretty much like calling Armisdale a liar to me."

Dare, too, skimmed the pages. "I am afraid it is pretty black, Ambrose; I should advise any man who brought me that, that an action would lie."

"Who is Armisdale, anyway?" asked Ambrose, savagely. "Is he rich? Would he compromise?"

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“ Armisdale is one of the best fakes I ever saw,” cut in Martin. “ He’s a member of the Corpus, though he doesn’t very often appear. Lean old humbug with a massive forehead and an indented chin masked under a beard, fierce moustaches, and lards his conversation with phrases from the most exotic tongues. Might be anything from a statesman to a music critic.”

“ That’s the man,” cried Mrs. Dare. “ Don’t you remember, Deborah, a tall man at the Gare du Nord who had a terrible row at the newspaper stall, when we were coming home last year ? ”

“ What happened ? ”

“ I don’t know, except that the last we saw of him was his retirement in the arms of four gendarmes. It was a case of ‘ *un terrible milord anglais*,’ but I am sure it was Lord Armisdale.”

Roderick had, in the meantime, been turning over “ Who’s Who.” “ The Armisdales were always a queer lot,” he remarked. “ One had to cut his lucky after 1715, and another joined old Simon Lovat, sinful Simon, on the scaffold after the ’45. Here we are—Armisdale, Philip Cameron, 9th Baron, b. 1862—ed. Beaumont ; Ch. Ch., Oxon. M.P. Nationalist, Strang Co. 1888. M.P. Cons. Badwell. 1892. Suc: father as 9th baron, 1904. Travelled extensively ; Morocco 1895 ; Upper Burma, 1900—1903 ; Taklamakan Desert 1908. Books—*The Liberator* 1887 : *Songs for Charmian*, 1895 : *Old Morocco*, 1899 : *The Eagle’s Mate*, 1900 : *The Cameron Expedition in Upper Burma*, 1905 : *Unexplored Turkestan*, 1910. Publications. . . . Address : 27 Bruton Street and Feshie Wells,

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Inverness-shire. Clubs : Travellers, Corpus. . . .
Tells you nothing, but that's the man."

Deborah caught Martin's eye, and made a gesture to go. He rose and made his farewells.

"Keep in touch with me," said Ambrose.

"You bet I will," Martin answered. "I want to know whether we are going to be downed for swingeing damages."

At three o'clock Martin and Deborah came down the steps of the house where they had danced.

"Don't call a cab, I'd rather walk," she said.

A primrose dawn had just crept over the roofs of Park Lane and helped the road washers to freshen the stale streets with a flood of clean light. Dirty cocoons, relics of humanity, crouched beneath newspapers, lay in a line beneath the railings of the Park. One rose as the young couple approached, eyed them without interest or reproach, made sub-human noises. Deborah shivered.

"Fancy becoming like that poor derelict."

"It is not written in our stars, Deborah."

"It might be in mine. . . . I still want something to do, Martin. You are happy now—now you have got a job of work, I mean?"

"Um," Martin nodded.

"I would like a job," she sighed.

"What can you do?"

"Nice young girl, well brought up in the best of houses, finished at the best schools, speaks two languages fluently but badly, plays the piano rather worse, golf handicap eighteen, dancing. . . . What a catalogue! Useless!"

"What about getting married?"

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"Oh, *that*. I've refused two this month."

"Falling in love, then. Deborah," he laughed, recalling her own remark, "fall in love with someone, as you told me, anyone—me, for instance."

"Don't laugh, Martin, no, please don't. I couldn't fall in love with you. It would spoil everything. You know what I mean, don't you, Martin dear? Bless you, my little one."

"Of course it won't do," returned Martin gravely. "Well, I won't with you then."

"Oh, Martin, you mustn't say that. You must fall in love with me. I want you to." She shook his arm. "Say you will, Martin. You know you're very presentable and I like being about with you. Say you will."

"All right, Deborah, I'll try."

"That's right, beloved. Here we are home. Martin, what a lovely morning."

They stood and looked at the golden light swelling over the housetops.

"How quickly it comes," said the girl, "how quickly it goes. Good-bye." She turned and ran into the house.

Martin rang up Ambrose next morning to inquire about the possible libel. His brother had no news, but that Mr. Ord was coming up that morning. Martin seized the opportunity of a query on some proof sheets to call at Lincoln's Inn Fields. He met his father on the doorstep and his punctual, cordial, "Glad to see you, my boy."

Ambrose met them in the senior partner's room; Stephen Retallick's book was under his arm. Mr.

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Ord gave it a heavy lidded, indifferent look, and thrust out a long lower lip.

"So you have been reading old Stephen's book, Ambrose, eh? He was a fine man, Stephen Retallick, and wrote in his brief way nearly as well as he lived. I hope it interested you."

"It interested me more than a little," replied Ambrose darkly. "You know it contains a gross libel, sir? I tackled Quarles about it just now and he tells me that he warned you about it." He looked suspiciously at his father whose head was nodding and whose lips had curved into an ironical grin.

"Libel, you say, Ambrose? Rather a strong remark, eh? Fair comment, isn't it, on a matter of public interest? However, you take the line Armisdale does, so you may be right."

He grinned and drawing the bulky portfolio which passed for a letter case from his pocket, selected and tossed a note to Ambrose. Martin looked over Ambrose's shoulder and read:

Dear Ord,

It hardly becomes two such distinguished members of the club as ourselves to fight a duel in a public court. Retallick's Autobiography is an infamous slander on my name and reputation. I give you the chance now of a graciously worded apology, the suppression of the edition, and a cheque for—shall we say—£1,500 as a solatium to my wounded dignity—about one half of the amount you would have to disburse in feeing the legal sharks. Come now, it is a fair offer.

Yours very truly,
Armisdale.

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Martin laughed. He could imagine the pleasure it would give this lordly Jingle to pen such a letter.

"What are you going to do, sir?" he asked. Ambrose cut the words short.

"Pay up, of course," he snapped. "Or at least compromise. He'll take five hundred."

Robert Ord looked at his two sons. To the dismay of one and the delight of the other, he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Pay up? Not I. I'll see Armisdale damned before I withdraw Retallick's book."

"Good heavens!" exploded Ambrose. "Really, sir, you are carrying the joke too far. It will ruin the firm, not to speak of poor Seagrave who edited it."

His father had recovered from his mirth. A hard look came over his face.

"You can set your poor mind at rest, my boy; the firm will not be ruined. This is my jaunt, my tumbril, if you will. I owe it to Retallick. Seagrave and Quarles both warned me. I shall indemnify Seagrave, indemnify the printers, and fight this as my own battle. And as a matter of fact, the battle is joined already, for I wrote Armisdale a note before I left home this morning, telling him I proposed to stand by Retallick's book and that our solicitors, Jonquil and Wisborough, would accept any document he proposed to utter now and in the future." He beamed on his two sons; Martin grinned back warmly, but Ambrose, more doubtful, drew his hand across his forehead.

"I don't like it, sir; it will be a nasty business—may do us a lot of harm."

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"Nonsense. No publisher in London was ever hurt by a libel action, and usually he is helped."

"What is your line of defence?"

"Justification and fair comment."

"Surely that will be very difficult to prove?"

"Not a bit. I have Retallick's old naturalist, Johnson, who will vouch for every word in the book."

Ambrose looked diffidently at his father.

"Yes, but can't Armisdale prove malice?"

"Malice—well, to you, I am malicious. I think Armisdale is a humbug, if you want my private opinion. Always have thought so since he ran away with . . . tut, tut, . . . what was her name—forget my own next—in '95, and didn't marry her. All his political rant, too, just what the French say, a 'cabotin.' We will torpedo Lord Armisdale, as sure as my name is Robert Ord."

"But malice?" Ambrose patiently tried to cool his father's excitement down.

"Never quarrelled with Armisdale in my life, save once, when I remonstrated with him over his manners at cards—and he didn't like it." The older man's eyes twinkled.

"What happened, sir?" Martin asked, guessing a story.

"Threw the cards at my head . . ."

"And?"

"I had to put him under the table. And, as he had left it, he had to pay all the stakes. But, bless my soul, that doesn't construe malice. Things like that were everyday occurrences at the old Corpus. Blood doesn't seem as thick to-day as it used to be."

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Armisdale won't want to be reminded of that. Now, go away, my boys, while I read my letters."

Ambrose mopped his brow again when he was outside the room.

"Mad!" he said hopelessly. "Quite mad! I wish we could lock him up." He raised his hands towards the ceiling as if imploring aid.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Martin, "it's his firm. We can't stand in the way. I would have liked to see the Governor holding Armisdale under the table. By Jove, what a dog fight it'll be." He laughed as he ran down the stairs.

About the same moment, an inoffensive archduke was being neatly dealt with in an obscure Serbian town, as preparation for another and maybe more entrancing dog fight.

The month that preceded the 1914-1918 war bears a considerable resemblance to the boiling of a kettle of water. On June the twenty-fifth, the pot was put on the hob. For a long time nothing happened to disturb the tranquillity of its surface; keen eyes might perhaps catch a hint of steam, the rise of an occasional bubble, but in England, people were too far from the stove to notice even these signs. The Irish and the politicians continued their depressing exploits; Henley was punctually observed; Joe Chamberlain died: Martin, Deborah and Aurea watched Cambridge skittled out for seventy-three—"a very tedious entertainment," Aurea remarked disdainfully--: Chaliapin sang better than ever, and people thought Stravinsky's new ballet—*Le Sacre du Printemps*—exceedingly

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ugly. Suddenly, towards the end of July, the twenty-sixth was it? the Central European kettle boiled with a most malevolent fervour. Some rushed to take it off; others held it firmly on the fire, and while they were all shouting, it suddenly—on August the first—boiled over and scalded a number of the cooks.

On the afternoon of August the fourth, the family gathered at Salley Bushes to do homage to Robert Ord on the occasion of his sixty-seventh birthday. Roderick Dare was not there: the House claimed him, and Fanny stayed in London to welcome him after the night's sitting. The day was appallingly hot—so hot that even Sybil Ord's voice was hushed—she had retired to her bedroom. Michael and Aurea had borrowed Martin's canoe and had fled to a private sanctuary up-river. Michael had arrived with a grim and preoccupied face, had said little during luncheon and had stolen away as soon as possible. The rest gathered in a circle on the lawn beneath the cedar to wait for the news which Palliser had arranged should be at once telephoned from his club.

The heat stood remorselessly over the countryside. The sun, aware, maybe, of the constriction of those human minds waiting for the word that would set them free or else imprison them more closely, held all nature steady in one poised and unending beat. The birds were hushed; the poplars slept; even the greyly glittering Thames seemed to have reined its flood and every eddy lay arrested like a pattern upon its ordained centre. No noise came to stir the waiting group: only the

vast orchestra of insect life spun a musical enchantment, Merlin's dream, to lull them even stiller, until surrendered so utterly—yes, there it was, that moment—they felt the quiet rise and fall of the sleeping earth's breast. "Let me lie here; let this moment stay," thought Martin. But the fragile poise was shattered. The elders, their thoughts oppressed by this onrushing catastrophe, could not bear the silence. Dan Palliser moved his chair and asked Robert Ord about the Armisdale case.

"Jonquil accepted service yesterday. We are fighting, you know."

"Who is your counsel?"

"They recommend Barker, and Roderick is going to lead."

"I am not sure that you are wise, Robert. It will cost you a lot of money, even if you win."

Robert Ord stirred irritably in his chair.

"I stand for truth," he growled. "Truth and no suppressions. Yes, yes, I know, 'the greater the truth the greater the libel;' but Armisdale could have given Stephen the lie when he was alive and did not. Now Stephen is dead, he will try to blacken his memory. I owe it to Stephen."

Palliser shrugged his shoulders.

"You always were a Quixote, Robert. I admire you. But hates and loves are cooler nowadays. It is not politic to pursue our enemies: nothing should be done that is not expedient, and I frankly think the publication was not."

"Expediency is a bad creed, Dan. It crucified a Christ some centuries ago."

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"I know, I know, and may crucify a number of other innocents in a few weeks time."

"War? Surely not. If it was your friends in office we would be at war already, but the Liberals dare not, dare not."

"I'm not so sure," said Palliser, shaking his head. "They may be forced."

"Forced?" echoed Robert Ord. "A Liberal Government *forced* on an issue like this. It would be treachery."

"They ought to have spoken two days ago—defined our policy. Germany depends on our standing neutral."

"Palmerston would have done it. Pam would have taught these damned continentals not to disturb the peace of Europe."

Dan Palliser raised his eyebrows. "There was Schleswig-Holstein," he reminded his host. "I am afraid you are going to be disappointed in your team, Robert. Too many Addingtons about in the Cabinet, too many 'ministers of mildest meaning.' Damn their kind, mild blue eyes," he added violently. "Here, don't let's brood on it. Take me round the garden."

Deborah and Martin, side by side, chins propped on elbows, watched them go.

"If there is war, Martin, what does it mean?"

"Haven't the remotest idea. I suppose the navy will take on the German fleet—and the army will go somewhere—France or Germany."

"Heaps of men are joining the army . . . shall I tell you a secret, Martin?"

"Do." (Lazily).

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"Michael applied for a commission and got it this morning."

"What!"

"Aurea told me just before lunch. Special Reserve, whatever that means. She seemed terribly pleased."

"But Mike is going to the Bar."

"Michael says that if war comes, it means a break in his career as a barrister, and he wants to get on with the new one quickly."

"He's welcome to it," grunted Martin. He was discomposed by this piece of news. The idea that a war would involve his family had not occurred to him. Why, a war would be over in six weeks, that was what his father said: and yet Mike who always saw clearly where he was going, had thrown everything up for a commission in an army never to be used. If Michael was right, he would have to join up too. Life was again becoming complicated just as he had straightened out his own part.

"Do you think I ought to do the same thing, Deb?"

"You—oh, Martin, no: no, I couldn't bear you to be shot."

"Oh, I shouldn't be shot. The war would end too soon."

"Do you think so? Really? Then why do anything?"

Well, anyhow, he would wait a day or so. Ambrose had asked him to come to-morrow to see the small printing works he had purchased, and to meet the manager with whom he was to work. War, in

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such a conjunction, seemed a fantastic, unreal thing, to be dismissed. He caught his brother before dinner, and asked him. Yes, Michael explained, he was sure the war, if it came, was going to last; he had got a reserve commission because he proposed to use this interruption to the best advantage he could—but Martin would be a fool to do likewise.

Dinner was eaten under the same sense of constraint that had weighed on them during the afternoon. Only Sybil seemed impervious to the atmosphere. Her hard voice rose and rocketed over the table.

"Where did Michael take you?" she asked Aurea.

"We went up to those woods, up-stream," was the brief reply.

"Dear children, so sylvan of you."

She turned to Palliser and demanded his opinion of a book by a young Jewish writer, "So amusing," she thought.

"Dreadful book," grunted her neighbour. "Thoroughly racial. The young man always seems to find the luscious word, usually a long one. Those lines of tetrasyllables make one think of a Petticoat Lane old clo'man in his four hats, eh? Thank God, there's the telephone."

He came back in a few minutes, his face grave.

"News?" asked Mr. Ord.

"The worst—War. It was Roderick speaking. The Germans have crossed the Belgian frontier. War is being declared as from midnight. The fleet went days ago and the army is going. They are

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putting Kitchener in charge and asking for a million men . . . War."

The silence that followed his announcement was suddenly broken by Robert Ord. His fist came down upon the table.

"The traitors!"

"Now, now. It couldn't be helped."

"It could have been prevented. It was the duty of the Government to stop it. That is the mandate that every Liberal Government goes into office with, and they have betrayed the country. It will kill the party." He sank back into his chair. The outburst had made the little company shrink. Aurea went pale, but Robert Ord saw it and leaned forward and patted her hand. "Never mind, my dear: it shall not hurt you. None of us, please God, shall be touched by it."

"Oh, but you don't know . . ." exclaimed the girl, and then looked across at Michael.

"I've got a commission, Father. I shall be joining on Friday at Dover."

After one moment of surprise, Robert Ord shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah well, you always would go your own way, boy . . . but no other soldiers in this house, d'you understand me, Martin?"

He did not trouble about his eldest son. Ambrose, he knew, was quite safe in Sybil's keeping. Indeed she said as much.

"Ambrose cannot be spared, anyhow."

Robert Ord grinned at her. "Well, perhaps you are right, Sybil. I am an old man too and I go to my bed. Good night and God bless you all."

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He turned and left the dining-room. As he climbed the stairs, he groaned. "Sixty-seven, sixty-seven, so I am. No good but for the grave. Poor children."

Palliser, Ambrose and Martin met in the library later.

"Well," said Ambrose.

"Well?" said Martin.

"Well," said Daniel Palliser. "Mix me a drink, Martin, like a kind boy. This is a nice business. Will it upset you, Ambrose? Bound to, I take it?"

Ambrose shook his head. His brain was already busy with certain complicated projects which so far as he could see, the war would further and assist, should credit not completely disappear. It was a pity he had already completed the contract for the printing works: in another six weeks he might have got it thirty per cent. cheaper. Paper was bound to rise momentarily, he felt, but that would be due to a shortage of stock. There was a very nice little mill for sale down in Berkshire: it was worth looking at more closely. Ambrose felt confident, almost elated.

"A good thing for the country in my opinion," he told Palliser. "It will pull us together before we let Labour get the upper hand."

Daniel Palliser made a gesture of dissent.

"But war . . . you don't know what it means. Have you thought of defeat? Of invasion? I can just remember being in Rouen in 1871 and seeing the German officers in their pickelhaubes swaggering along the quays. Ugh! they were not pretty. The worst animal in Europe, the German, and they are

four times as strong now." He went on discussing the chances.

Martin slipped away. He walked slowly up the stairs and went out on to the small balcony that projected from the gallery. The warm August night kissed his cheeks lightly. Beyond the osiers he could see the dark line of the river, slit by an occasional silvery ripple, and, beyond, the line of the Chilterns, scarfed in silvery mist. So quiet was it that he could catch the water's never ceasing murmur, and the wash against the bank. Not a quiver of wind, not even an uneasy bird stirring, nor an owl's cry. The kindly plants and shrubs threw up their grateful odours: a tang of marjoram came to his nostrils, borne upwards on a scent cushion of earth and grass. So quiet this England, so tranquil. This only, this landscape in his sight was real. Everything outside and beyond had no existence.

He was startled by a quaver of laughter and the brush of feet on the terrace below. Michael and Aurea came into view round the corner of the house, his brother's arm round the girl's shoulders. Every few paces he stopped and kissed her upturned lips. They passed below Martin.

"Am I beautiful?" he heard her voice plead. "Tell me."

Michael laughed.

"Beautiful? Witch! Isn't this proof enough?" He took Aurea by the waist and shoulders and kissed her long and hungrily. Their bodies clung together, abandoned to the prick of their senses, until Aurea pulled herself free and said:

"You hurt me." But Michael only laughed.

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“Bed’s the place for you, my girl,” he said. “Quick—come along,” and taking her urgently drew her into the house.

Quiet fell on the terrace ; but the enchantment of the night was broken for the watcher on the balcony. Something warmer stirred in him. Dissatisfied, he stamped his heel against the lead, once : then turned and went to his room.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Martin reached his rooms on the following evening he was greeted by Mrs. Kiggell with a grim face and a sombrely dramatic style.

"You're alone, sir. Mr. Poole 'as gone. 'E came in last night about two o'clock in the morning and comes knocking at my door. 'K,' says I, 'Get up. Mr. Poole 'as come home mad—or worse—drunk.' So Kiggell gone to the door, and having locked it, asks what 'e wants. 'Breakfast,' 'e calls, 'Breakfast at eight sharp. My King and Country—not to mention Lord Kitchener—all want me. Tell Mrs. Kiggell,' 'e goes on, 'His Majesty particularly desires it that I should breakfast at eight sharp. Good night.' And with that 'e falls the 'ole flight of stairs and sits on his best top 'at. It was lying there this morning when I went down—flat it was—I showed it to 'im at breakfast. 'You can keep it, Mrs. K.' 'e says with a laugh, 'to fledge my eagles in. Never again shall I wear anything but my old shako.' Then 'e begins singing again and goes off in 'is worst old pair of grey flannel trousers—the ones where I had to patch the seat—to fight the Germans—the nasty thieves. I don't know what they'll think of 'im if they catch 'im—poor motherless lad—but I 'ope 'e'll let them know that I didn't send 'im out that way."

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Before Martin had unpacked, the discarder of top hats turned up, flushed with excitement and breathlessly garrulous.

"Such a day, old top. I was sworn in at Lincoln's Inn this morning, vetted this afternoon, measured for a uniform and entered for a Kitchener commission. Such luck. I'm Number 1784, Private Poole, E., 1st Battalion, Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps. I shall be walking out with a nursemaid next Sunday. So look out for me. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought about it," Martin stammered. In truth he had not. He had motored up with Sybil and Ambrose that morning: they had gone straight to the works Ambrose had purchased, where they had met Bruce the manager, who was to guide Martin's footsteps. He had taken to Bruce at once, a taciturn Scot, with, however, so lively an interest in machinery that he had thawed to Martin's enthusiasm and had spent the day going over the plant in detail. They had tested machines, drawn plans, run through the specimen books, and filled a large exercise book with notes. Over a cup of coffee at an A.B.C. about five o'clock, they had compared views.

"The Miehle in No. 4 bay wants scrapping," Martin had declared.

"I'm no so sure. She wants cleaning, and a good overhaul, but I think I can raise nine-feefty revs. out of her. Give me a week, Mr. Martin, with the foreman, before we decide. We don't want to scrap good machinery."

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"The case room's in an awful state, but we can get that right."

"Ay, and the ink. Losh, did ye ever see sic filthy soot? Never mind, sir, we'll have a' to richts in a month, or maybe two."

"Well, we don't take over till September thirtieth. We've got plenty of time to make our plans. I'll be seeing you at Lincoln's Inn Fields on Monday."

As they emerged into the street, an orange placard, announcing the French invasion of Alsace-Lorraine caught the eye.

"A hope these damned politicians with their war willna upset things," Bruce observed.

"War?" said Martin vaguely. "Oh, I don't suppose so."

And now Essex Poole was asking him what he was going to do. He saw his eager inviting eye and felt ashamed of not being able to meet it.

"Do?" he said. "What should I do? It won't last six weeks, my father said at breakfast."

"Kitchener says three years at least," rejoined Poole.

"Oh damn!" exclaimed Martin in exasperation. "Look here, Essex, I'm just on the point of starting in quite a big show, for which Ambrose has put up the money. I can't let him down just to go playing soldiers. It's too serious."

"Perhaps you're right, old man. Selfish of me and all that, I'd hoped you'd come along."

Martin looked at his friend's pleading eyes. He shook his head.

"I wish I could," he said. He suddenly felt

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lonely. "Do you really think it will last three years, Essex?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. I'll be quite happy if I can have a pot at an old sausage eater. Look here, Martin, what about a little dinner here? My old father is coming up to London next week. I wish you'd ask your uncle. Mrs. K. can put on a rattling good dinner, and I'll get in the wine. What do you say? Good."

Martin put his clothes away gloomily. His excitement over the new job withered under Essex Poole's more simple, confident enthusiasm. He had half a mind—no, he would not think about it. He spent the evening over his note-book writing out in more detail the points he had noted which would require alteration.

He called at Lincoln's Inn Fields on the following afternoon, and was greeted mournfully by Albert.

"Oh dear, oh dear, Mr. Martin, such goings as there's been all day. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Jones" (these were two of the travellers) "have both been called up, and that young 'eathen—pardon, heathen—Prabble goes off two days ago without by your leave or with your leave, and comes peacocking in this morning all covered with spurs and finery, to hand in his resignation, he says, the impudence. 'You're not going to come in here, Prabble,' I tell him, 'prancing about in that Jezebel's finery. You've got the sack, my lad,' I said, 'and you don't go downstairs to corrupt the rest of the little boys,' I said. And then he had the cheek to say he was one of my defenders. 'I'm a rough-rider,' he says.

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‘ Rough-rider,’ I told him, ‘ the only time you ever rode was on a donkey on Margate beach—and that was in a pannier with a big stone on the other side.’ Oh, well, in the end, we shook hands and I ’ad—had—to let him in to say good-bye to his rascallions. And, blow me ” (Albert was getting quite excited) “ if two of the little dev . . . rascals, I should say, Mr. Martin, didn’t sneak off after dinner and try to join up too—but I’m glad to say the army sent them away with a couple of fleas in their ears—and serve them right. Mr. Ambrose ? To tell you the truth, I’ve hardly dared to speak to him all day. His face is that white, and his temper ! I wouldn’t like to call it Christian.”

Martin found Ambrose alone in his room.

“ You’ve heard about our deserters, Martin ? Pretty business, isn’t it ? I shall make it a rule in future that no member of the staff shall belong to any military organization. All this Territorial nonsense of old Haldane’s. It’s crippling trade.”

They talked for some time about the new works and Martin rose to go. Ambrose rose too. He looked very worn and harassed ; he had listened to all Martin had had to say, had agreed to his suggestions, and generally had been unwontedly kind.

“ You won’t do anything foolish, will you, Nipper ? ” he asked at the end, putting a hand on Martin’s shoulder. “ I rely on you to help us through the bad time.”

Martin looked down into the square before replying. Over there to the left he could see the garden behind Lincoln’s Inn Hall. Under the trees stood knots of youths and men in flannel trousers

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and old coats, gathered round khaki figures lecturing. He sighed, and then shook himself.

"No. I'll see you through all right, Ambrose."

For the next week or so, he flung himself into his work, turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the sights and sounds of a city in the fever of war excitement. If groups of soldiers passed him in the street, he looked the other way: to columns of dusty, jocund recruits, he turned his shoulder and gazed into a shop window. So far as he could, he shut out this menace from his mind. Work, work, work: there was nothing else. In the evenings, he sat unwillingly with Essex Poole and listened to him dilating on the art of war. At last the night of the famous dinner arrived, not without its troubles. Essex had carefully borne home his selected wines in person, a trustworthy hock, some perfect claret, and three bottles of port, a week before the affair. "Must give 'em a chance to settle, y'know," he said gravely. "I only hope I've got enough." He knitted his brows anxiously at an array of bottles as formidable as a brigade of artillery. Later he turned to the menu, but here he fell foul of Mrs. Kiggell.

"Sole, sir," said Mrs. Kiggell, "you can't 'ave sole. Much too expensive."

"Oh nonsense," replied the gourmet, slapping his *Times*. His eye unhappily lighted on the Billingsgate price list. "Here you are—Sole . . . five shillings the quintal. We don't want a quintal."

Upon which Mrs. Kiggell failed completely to preserve the respect due to the uniform.

"Me!" she said. "At my time of life! To be

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told the price of fish by a whippersnapper young enough to be my grandson. I never 'eard such a thing. I'll ask you, Mr. Poole, to buy your own food, yes, and to cook it yourself. To talk to me like that."

Essex abased himself and after due apologies, coldly received, the matter was adjusted, but the last word remained with Mrs. Kiggell.

"Well, sole you shall 'ave, Mr. Poole, since you're willing to pay for it. But I 'ope you'll make it clear to your Pa that this is a special occasion and that I don't make a practice of feeding you young gentlemen on the fat o' the land."

The party assembled in the sitting-room, three white waistcoats and the uniform, which Essex could hardly be persuaded to abandon even for sleep. ("Must harden oneself for campaigning," he urged portentously.) The elder Poole was a pleasant, clean old gentleman, beautifully dressed, with a white moustache, and faintly scented with the perfume of very good cigars and lavender water. Martin liked him at once, though his first remark stabbed him.

"Well, you haven't lost your head and your heart to a uniform like my young rascal, eh?"

Essex, seeing the mounting pain in his friend's eyes, intervened, saying that Martin was engaged on far more important affairs; and then they all went down to dinner. Talk inevitably turned on the war.

"A long business, I fear," said Mr. Poole. Dan Palliser shook his head.

"I'm afraid so; yes, I believe in Kitchener.

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Three years, or the duration, I put it at five. I am taking my precautions."

"Precautions?"

"I went to Davis this morning and ordered sufficient clothes for five years," Palliser said very seriously. "If it goes on, cloth will get very poor, very poor indeed. Then I went on to my wine merchant's and got him to lay me in eighty dozen of my special whisky. You never know when governments will begin tampering with necessities in war time. One must be ready to stand a siege, you know."

"A good idea, a very good idea," agreed Mr. Poole. "Remind me of that to-morrow, Essex. I think I will walk round and have a word with my tailor too. I remember how difficult it became about the end of '70 to get one's little things. There was a certain open-work stocking I used to get in Paris for a young friend of mine. By Jove, when the Prussians started the siege and I couldn't get any more, she very nearly cut my acquaintance. By Jove, she did. I had to offer to go up in a balloon before she would relent." He chuckled.

"A very pleasant claret, this of yours, Essex," remarked Dan Palliser, to his gratified host. "Yes—a *nice* wine."

The overwhelmed Essex turned crimson with joy, choked over his cutlet and blushed deeper still.

"Liège has fallen I see," said Palliser. "Yes, thank you, I will have another cutlet. Still, it lasted seven days and has held them up badly. I should think it will take them at least four times as long to get past Namur. Mark my words, we

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shall stop these atrocious ruffians on the French frontier."

For the rest of the evening, the chances and rumours of war were debated and appraised. When Mr. Poole left to go, Essex accompanied him, begging Dan Palliser to stay until his return.

"I am very sorry to run off like this," said the elder Poole, "but I don't sleep as well as I did, and one hour before midnight means a lot to me. Good night. Good night."

As soon as Palliser and he were alone, Martin burst forth with his dilemma.

"What am I to do, Uncle Dan? For God's sake advise me. I feel absolutely lost. I ought to join the army, I know. But the Governor says one of the family is enough, and Ambrose says he can't get on without me. Essex wants me to join him—and altogether I'm worried to death. Do you really think it is serious?"

(That evening the 4th Royal Fusiliers and the 4th Middlesex Regiment were digging themselves in along the angle of a canal bank, north of Mons.)

"My dear old chap," replied Dan Palliser, drawing at his cigar, "I can't advise you: no one can. It is a question of whichever side roasts you more furiously. For your father, I don't think you need worry; he will accept anything you do, Martin, as seriously as you take it yourself. For Ambrose, I can't vouch. He is bound to put up as big a wail as he can to prevent your leaving him, but I can't think that you are yet indispensable. As for myself, nothing you did or didn't do will alter my affection for you. As for the war, I said it would

last three years, but no one knows. There are no precedents for a big war. The Franco-Prussian was child's play to this ; and France wasn't ready. This time she is : but at any moment we may all find that the game isn't worth the candle."

Martin made a hopeless gesture with his hands.

"You tell me nothing that I don't know."

"Come, come, Martin, you are funkling the issue. Look here, if you want advice, why not go and talk to Deborah ? That child has brains, though Fanny and Rod won't believe me. She'll put you right."

Essex Poole returned, and the rest of the evening was spent discussing, with much drawing on paper and the contents of match-boxes, the difficult problem of turning a battalion inside out.

Martin did not seek Deborah. Three afternoons later, as he turned up Shaftesbury Avenue, an elderly Frenchman, drunk, leaning on the arm of a compatriot, suddenly pointed a finger at him and screamed "*A la guerre ! A la guerre !*" Martin looked round contemptuously. His eye caught a Pall Mall Gazette poster with the black letters—
FALL OF NAMUR. Namur fallen ! Namur, the impregnable fortress captured, Namur that should have held out for eternity, fallen after three days' fighting. The Germans were attacking all along the line. He darted to a taxi, and told him to drive to Lincoln's Inn. He hung about miserably in Old Square until Essex came off parade and then drove him rapidly into the Head-quarters and enrolled himself as an aspirant officer in the New Army.

Having solved his problem, Martin was happy.

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Robert Ord, he found, approved of his choice. Ambrose, immersed in plots and schemes—he was busy buying up cheap rights of novels from timorous rivals—gave him no more than a sarcasm at the expense of his brains : Bruce, the elder brother was satisfied, was quite capable of running the works. Deborah he saw but once. She was going to Dover to stay with Mike and Aurea in the rooms they had taken pending Mike's transfer to a battalion in France. She laughed over Aurea's description of their terrible lodging. "She says they are 'd'une squaleur inexprimable.' What we women have to put up with ! I shall stay down there until I find—or Father finds me—something to do. One must do things, Martin, if it is only to stop oneself thinking."

"Nursing ?"

"No. Definitely no. I don't see myself as a ministering angel. I should only be a floor-washer or an eye-delighter to officers ; and neither of those functions would stop me thinking. Father says that someone is forming an addition to the Intelligence Departments, and he can get me in there when it is ready. But it is weary, waiting, Martin."

"Perhaps not so long."

"Perhaps not," she said listlessly. "Oh, I feel so restless. I want—I want—oh, what do I want ? And then you are all going away. It is like the end of a story. Jack Candish—you remember him ? He is dead, and poor little Dickie Garron, they say, won't recover. If anything happens to you, or to Michael . . ."

They were sitting on the grass in Hyde Park

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among a crowd of similar couples. Martin put his arms round Deborah's shoulders. She clung to him like a child. He kissed her cheek, and she smiled at him and put her arms round his neck.

"Dear Martin," she whispered, "you will come back, I know."

They got up and walked slowly through the gathering darkness to the gates, and then each went their way. Martin returned to his training corps at Berkhamstead. Each day he was becoming more enthralled in this new occupation. The life, physically hardening, made every nerve in his body thrill with the exultation of perfect fitness. From the morning run, a mile through grey light over dewy meadows, a thousand vigorous companions, led by that square, hard adjutant, even at this hour meticulously arrayed in breeches and belt, to the last mournful note of "Lights out" hovering over the tents, like a swan's song, each moment of existence was like a precious jewel; even the tiring dusty marches, the stale old songs, the silly little jokes, had their place in the regalia. How sweet to fling oneself down on a couch of heather after a hard morning and to take in deep draughts of the scent of gorse: how magical on guard to watch the uncontaminated dawn creep over the rim of the sky and gather each paling diamond star into her bosom.

Only at week-ends did he find life dull. He would, when he got leave, come up to London, see his father and Ambrose, hear the news of the firm, dine at the Corpus, stuffed with bloodthirsty ancients from whom he shrank just a little, and occasionally accompany Essex Poole to a show—but Essex

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Poole got his commission and left to impart his knowledge of the "Triangle of error" and other mysteries to a battalion of Lowland Scots—"The Paladins," he chuckled, "by God, Martin, the Paladins, what stupendous luck." With his departure, that thirty-six hours' leave became immeasurably long; and to stay in camp or drink in the canteen, worse. He wanted a friend. His mind sought for someone and lighted on Deborah, in Dover. Her brief notes had been rare birds he had looked for as eagerly as the watcher of water fowl on the Norfolk coast; and each one, he realized, had given him a quick spasm of pleasure as he saw the small neat writing on the envelope. As the weeks that separated them from their last meeting rose in number, so much the more did he begin to long for her bright face and large understanding eyes. At night on his palliasse, he began to repeat over her name to himself; on guard, he would fashion pleasures for Deborah and him to share. At one point, he pulled himself up with a jerk and asked, "Am I a fool, just a war-stricken sentimentalist like half a hundred other men in this camp, or do I want Deborah for herself?" His serious mind reassured him. There was no mistake. He was in love, calf love it might be, but calf love is not always sacrificed as veal.

Finally in November, he could endure it no longer. He wrote to her asking her to meet him in London one Saturday night. Almost at once he received an answer, but it was not what he had expected. Michael was ordered to France with a draft in ten days and was giving a party in

London to make his farewells. Aurea would be coming, herself, Michael, a man called Brian Sharlow in Michael's regiment, and to make the party even, another friend of Deborah's, a girl called Susan Gyle, whom Martin detested, had been invited. Martin shrugged his shoulders and accepted. He trusted that he would have an opportunity to talk to Deborah on Sunday.

Martin arrived early at the Café Royal. So for his sins did Miss Gyle, a hop-pole blonde, given to explosive conversation and a deadening manner of saying, "Yes, *aren't* they?" The rest of the party were ten minutes late and Martin, under the strain of Sukey Gyle's broadside, was bitter-tongued and ill-tempered by the time the others arrived. Brian Sharlow he found to be an agreeable young man of five or six and twenty, a few days senior in the army to Michael, but full of easy admiration for his brother. As they drank a cocktail together, Martin noticed that his costume was very correct, that he had dark hair and eyes, and a slightly sensual mouth.

"Marvellous fellow, your brother," confided Sharlow, "absolute tip-topper. Going out to the first battalion next week—they have had a lot of casualties at Ypres—but he will come through. Quite the most effective subaltern we have had since August. Bound to succeed."

"Mike always could master things quickly," returned Martin.

"Awfully popular, too," went on Sharlow. "Everyone goes down to his digs, you know, for a quiet little evening, not so quiet either, but very

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jolly, and Aurea" ("Hallo!" thought Martin) "and Deborah" ("Christ! No. Steady the Buffs") "make it even better."

Aurea and Deborah joined them from the cloak-room—Deborah had given him no more than a shy smile and a friendly little pat—and Mike led them off to his table. Aurea lingered a minute and caught Martin's eye.

"Who's your young friend?" asked Martin, with a touch of hostility. He felt immensely aged and superior and rather out of it.

"Brian Sharlow? Quite a dear—assistant-adjutant. Here, Martin, let me whisper. He's wildly épris with Deborah."

"And she?"

"Oh, Deborah!" Aurea shrugged and smiled. "She has refused him once, but I happen to know she won't twice. Leave them alone together when we go in."

In November, 1914, dinners had not yet descended to the level when you were lucky to get a piece of meat if you had not forgotten to bring your ticket. Mike's dinner was a sumptuous affair, crowned with a noble wine. Michael, excited at his departure, dominated the table. Martin, between Aurea and the Gyle girl, appreciated his brother's wild spirits and even, though his mind was heavy as lead, made some attempt to emulate him. Sharlow, he noticed, did not say much, but drank heavily without apparently being any the worse: he was looking unutterable things at Deborah, who seemed nervous and inclined to join too quickly in any laugh. She caught Martin's eye and gave him a

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pathetic little grimace. Michael's health was drunk in a profusion of cordiality ; after which a silence fell upon the party.

"Lucky old Michael," said Sharlow.

"Ye-es, I think so," agreed Mike.

"Wish I was going," went on Mr. Sharlow, though privately he was congratulating himself on having secured a job which would, with due care, keep him safe in England.

"Oh, you will come out soon enough, Brian," laughed Michael. "As soon as I am potted in a nice soft place, I shall say, 'Send for Brian : he is the one for these high stomached Germans,' and up you'll pop."

"Michael," cried Aurea, "don't talk about getting potted in that ruthless way; I can't bear it."

"Bound to happen, I'm afraid, sooner or later," said Mr. Sharlow, sorrowfully. "They give six weeks to a subaltern in France, you know—forty-two days, and a day more to a private soldier."

"You and your six weeks, Brian," scoffed the probable victim. "I shall be commanding an Army Corps by then and be G.O.C. in C. the week after."

"It is all very fine for Michael to laugh," said Sharlow quietly to Deborah, "but they've been having a lot of casualties lately. I don't suppose any of us will be left at Dover in a month's time."

"Oh, not as soon as that," said the girl with a quick upward glance. "They will keep you, won't they?"

"Anyone can fill my job. In fact, as soon as a likely substitute comes along, I shall give it up. I

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can't stand this while all the decent fellows are going away and only dirty little pip-squeaks taking their places." His eye, unobserved, lighted for a moment on Martin.

At this point, Aurea gathered her guests up and swept them out. "You'll go with Michael, Martin and me, Sukey," she said in the cloakroom. "Deborah, look after Brian."

"Oh, no," cried Deborah, dismayed. "Let Martin take me, I haven't spoken a word to him yet."

"Nonsense, darling," said Aurea firmly, "Martin wants to talk to Michael."

Aurea knew all about Brian Sharlow. She had flirted with him a little when she first met him, but she had soon discovered that he was so much of her own temperament that it would end in a drawn battle. Her own chief weapon was a kind of mental seduction which could at will be converted into a more potent physical enslavement; and Brian Sharlow, lazy though he was, possessed the same method of attraction. She had therefore signed a mute alliance with him; and, when he in his time fell to the sweeter and more honest charm of Deborah, stood by to place the weapons in his hand.

As for Deborah, she knew that the girl was nervous and restless. The war seemed to have taken hold of her, as it was taking hold of innumerable other men and women, and acting as a powerful toxin. Sharlow had danced with her frequently and they had become friends. He was by no means a stupid man. He had been up at Cambridge, and

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on coming down, had worked without either success or ill success, as a reporter in Fleet Street. He had a fund of bright and amusing conversation, the recollections of other men's tales in the street where tales are bred, and enough knowledge of the world to be able to give a short character sketch of any well-known personage. At the beginning he had tried to rush Deborah, but when the girl, frightened by his physical power, had drawn back, he had adopted slower and surer methods, had talked to her, and gradually won her confidence. For Deborah, in spite of her high courage and her up-tipped nose, ready to fling a challenge or a jest with equal gusto, had little experience of any save striplings of her own age. She found Sharlow telling her things that Martin and Michael could not, and her father had never troubled to. So the persistence began to tell. She found herself half attracted, half repelled by this poised, certain man. She had broken off one encounter. She was less certain of a second.

In the cab, Brian Sharlow continued his gloomy reflection. He complained bitterly that the war had broken his career in half, that soon he would be going out to France, not like Mike, surrounded by adoring friends—but alone.

"No one will care a damn," he said, "whether I come back or not. If Michael is wounded, he will have his pretty wife to nurse him, but I shouldn't have a soul. Oh, well, it doesn't matter."

This new and pathetic side of Brian drew Deborah's heart. She leaned forward from her corner and patted him on the hand.

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"Oh, Brian," she said, "I shall care very much indeed. I'd look after you."

"I wish to God you meant it," he said.

"But I do, I do." Eagerly she leaned forward; her cloak fell open, revealing that young thin shoulder, as yet half formed.

"Really?" He was very close to her. She felt his presence, a nymph half free, half caught in the young goatherd's net.

"Really," she whispered; then in a kind of stupor: "Yes, Brian, really and truly. I do love you." She tried to shrink back, but he caught her and held her firmly, kissing her lips, her ear, the top of her head. Woefully she felt she was betrayed, was nauseated by the stale wine in his breath, and hurt by the buttons on his jacket, but she could not withdraw. Then she clung to him.

They drew up at the theatre. The rest of the party were waiting. Brian took her arm very gently and led her up to them.

"Deborah and I have settled things in the cab," he said quietly. "We are going to be married."

Martin took a pace forward, nearly swore, bit his tongue and shot a look at his cousin. She gave him a sad little smile—there was a hint of tears in her eyes—she nodded to him as though bidding him farewell.

He sat through the show somehow, said good-bye to Michael—"Good luck, Mike." "I have it, Martin, I know," said Mike—and fled to the Corpus. Here he burst into the card-room, cut into the first table he could, drank four large whiskies and sodas, played extraordinarily wildly and fortunately, and

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was eventually piloted to his dank bed by an elderly club waiter, where he promptly fell into a stupefied slumber. Henry looked at him ; his old head on one side. " Some takes it one way," he soliloquized, " some another, but this young lot are very quiet."

CHAPTER V

MARTIN awoke on Sunday morning with a macking headache. He spent the morning crouched over a fire, dazed and morbid, but during the afternoon his youthful vitality reasserted itself. He recovered sufficiently to write his cousin a brief note of congratulation, but it took him a couple of hours to bring it to the proper degree of warmth. Then he went back to camp and tried to absorb himself completely in his daily activities.

Deborah spent the Sunday trying to explain to her bewildered parents that she was engaged to be married. Brian Sharlow was produced, and, after a short closeting with Roderick, passed as satisfactory. The couple were sent back to Dover under Aurea's wing. Deborah, shy and puzzled, tried without success to analyse her feelings for her fiancé. She liked him well enough ; she was fond of him in a way ; she was sorry for him ; and yet was this all that she ought to feel ? Was love only this ? Tired, she surrendered to the idea. As for Sharlow, he behaved with the greatest tact and assumed a pleading rather than a possessive air.

On the day following Michael's departure, the girls came back to London, Aurea to the flat she and Michael had taken, Deborah to her father's

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house. It had been arranged that the wedding should take place soon, in January ; with the ever-present chance of Brian being sent on foreign service, it was only decent. She turned to buying clothes and making preparations ; and in the whirl of shopping lost her apprehension.

In December, Martin was gazetted to a service battalion of his brother's regiment, and journeyed down to the bleak south coast town where it was billeted. After the precise and kindly discipline of the training corps, tenderly observed by each individual, who would rather have been shot than declared unfit to hold His Majesty's commission, the complete inadequacy of the motley band he joined was something of a shock. Like many of the new battalions, the 13th Swallowtails was completely destitute of every aid to military efficiency. The officers were a heterogeneous gathering of ex-troopers from the colonial police, of remount officers of the South African war, of slovens and worse, who had obtained commissions by influence, gentleman adventurers, with here and there an old regular N.C.O. and a sprinkling of keen youths from the universities to lend an air of enthusiasm. The regular non-commissioned officers were, for the most part, time expired men of the old anything-can-be-wangled-in-the-Army school—indeed, one was of such ancient date that he still used the formula, "Ready, Present, Fire," during musketry exercises. Below this hierarchy were a dazed and dusty collection of a thousand men of all classes and all professions, for the greater part willing to be taught and to be led, bowing meekly

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to military despotism, but, in January 1915, as useless in the field as a hedge of hurdles. The only matter on which they failed to respond to military influence, was that of leave. No good civilian can understand the reason why he should be deprived of the society of the missus and kids on Sunday, and in consequence the list of absentees on a Sabbath evening was invariably prodigious, while on Monday morning a number of expostulating and explanatory defaulters did their best to avert their inevitable punishment by lengthy arguments with kind old Colonel Rowe (Indian Army, retired) who ought to have been crowning his valiant days of the Frontier and Burma with the peace of Cheltenham.

Still, the command of a rabble platoon gave Martin much to fill his head. The 7 o'clock parade in the dark and the march along the sea front, mornings on the Downs digging or playing at outposts ; afternoons in lecture rooms, teaching the mechanism of the rifle, evenings when there was boxing or a concert, occupied him. He made friends with those of his own age and spent hours studying the art of cartography or discussing the theories and practices of the new warfare. Here he was helped by Michael : for he had succeeded in persuading his brother to write to him of war as it really is, and Michael's weekly letter became to the company mess what St. Paul's epistles were to the Ephesians.

"De Imitatione Belli, IV " one began. "I have had the most extraordinary luck so far. I have had my platoon, so to speak, shot under me twice—only three survivors last time. Count up to a minute

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and you will understand how it has been.” (“Hill 60, my hat ” commented the reader) “Don’t bother about F.S.R. or anything of that kind. Vauban on Fortification is nearer our mark to-day. We are becoming positively archaic with our mines and spring guns and other contraptions. By the time you come out, the testudo will be the order of the day. So buy a ‘Gallic War’ and sharpen up your spear. . . . Tell Aurea to send me out more and more socks. The girl isn’t taking proper care of her minstrel boy, and, if you are in London, send me out some brandied cherries to put along the parapet and allure the enemy. These are the soldier’s only joy. You will rejoice with me that I have got my company—a poor thing—I daren’t tell you how poor—but my very own. The C.O. has very kindly recommended me for some kind of medal, and what is more . . . but I dare not talk of that.”

“Bless him,” said Martin as he thought of his brother’s gay curly head and trim body. It was like him to keep cheerful in the midst of unimaginable horrors. He turned to his writing-table and replied with a long description of his hopes for his platoon. Then he picked up another letter, from Deborah, asking him to come and see her through her wedding. He answered briefly that he could not get leave. He would not wail over his unfulfilled desires, his tardy self-realization, but at least he need not rub salt into his wound. His bank account was larger than he had thought. He found and bought a small necklet, no more, of little pearls: their tiny beauty seemed in some way to symbolize Deborah’s Arcadian virginity.

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On the other hand he made a bold application for leave in March and succeeded. The case of *Armisdale v. Seagrave and Ord* was down for hearing and, by boldly affirming that he would be required as a witness, he wangled seven days.

On the morning on which the case was to be heard, the Ord clan gathered at the old-fashioned dusty offices of Jonquil and Wisborough in Lincoln's Inn. While Mr. Jonquil senior exercised a genial patronage over the case, its active preparation had been in the hands of the younger Wisborough, a bustling youth of two and forty, who had complete charge of the litigious side of the business, and who loved a martial client with all the fervour of a fire-eating corps commander.

"All here, my dear sir? All ready? Fine, fine. We'll eat the other side to-day, mark my words. Eat 'em, butter and pepper and all." He almost patted Robert Ord on the back as he opened the door for him.

"How's the Governor?" asked Martin of Ambrose as they marched down towards the courts.

"Dangerous, very dangerous and inflammable," replied Ambrose gloomily. "I feel as nervous as if I were going to my own execution."

They forced their way into the tiny dismal court, through the serried ranks of clerks, solicitors and barristers who stand about in courts like bales of carpet in a rug store, decorative in parts, but unwieldy to remove. Mr. Ord was already accommodated at the solicitors' table beside Seagrave, a red nosed, perspiring wisp of humanity, and the

gigantic Ormiston, who was present as the printer involved. Martin snuggled into a bench next to Mrs. Dare, and breathed a good morning. He could see the back of Roderick Dare's wig. "How's our Sergeant Snubbin this morning?" he asked. "Make a good breakfast?"

"Hush, you silly boy. No. I'm afraid Rod is rather uncertain of the result. I know the auguries too well. He was polite to my cat at breakfast, which means he is trying to propitiate every deity he has heard of."

"Who are all these lovely ladies?" The court was gradually filling with a number of fashionably dressed dames.

"Don't talk so loudly, Martin . . . I think they must be Lord Armisdale's guardian angels. That is Mrs. Manley, and there is Lady Corbett with the osprey." She named three or four other women.

"Quite a covey for one poor forked radish."

"There's Lord Armisdale's counsel coming in now, Gamaliel Charters."

"Buzfuz it is, by Jove!" Sir Gamaliel Charters had indeed not a little of Charles Dickens's creation in his person. He was fat, he was plethoric; and he had never in his life been able to lower his voice below a husky rattle. He almost shouted a greeting at his brother silk, before sitting down to wipe his face with a large bandanna handkerchief.

"Three bars agitato—Enter the villain."

The tall thin figure of Lord Armisdale was edging through the crowd. All the angels smiled and two waved handkerchiefs. He moved quickly to the

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nearest, bowed and gallantly kissed a white-gloved hand before joining his solicitor in front. A buzz of conversation sprang up to be instantly hushed by the usher's shout and the appearance of Mr. Justice Redruth.

Whereas some judges are apt to seek popularity by unseasonable buffoonery, the reputation of Sir James Redruth was due solely to his complete magnificence. His calm eye, his apparent lack of feeling, his eighteenth century elegance, his mannered diction, had gained him a position that no number of wrong decisions could assail. In his scarlet and ermine, with his noble brow crowned by that becoming wig, he looked the very embodiment of the judiciary. It was only in private life that the figure dwindled. The wig doffed, it was found that Sir James had practically no back to his head. The vulgar said that the reason Jimmy Redruth went to the bar was because it was the only trade where he could hide his mental disabilities beneath the kindly shrubbery of horsehair; but whatever truth may lie in the ribaldry of his acquaintance, it is not to be denied that the façade was wholly successful.

After the usual legal Derby-dog played by three or four junior barristers asking for cases to stand out of the list, to come into the list, to be held over till next term, granted by his lordship with a graceful gesture of his long white hand, the case of Armisdale against Seagrave was called, and battle joined. The jury was sworn and Lord Armisdale's junior read the pleadings in a suety voice. The libel was contained, it was said, in various paragraphs in

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Stephen Retallick's diaries implying that the Turkestan Expedition of 1909, led by Lord Armisdale, had not in fact been anywhere near the places he had described, and that the author was in fact a liar, etc., etc. Damages so far as would meet the case were claimed. The junior sat down and Sir Gamaliel Charters rose. Sir Gamaliel is reputed to have a way with a jury, and in his opening he roared a great deal, snuffled a certain amount, blew his nose violently, gesticulated, honeyed his voice, so far as an addiction to port would permit the exercise, talked orotundly of his noble client, this great explorer, this traduced innocent, and in short reiterated the familiar patter, which has served the legal practitioner since the spacious days of Coke and Bacon, and from which none has ever diverged: it saves thinking. After an impassioned demand for thumping damages, some sneers at the defendants, some politeness to his Lordship, Sir Gamaliel plumped down on his seat with enough force for the stout oak to heave him into the air again, and blurted, "Call Lord Armisdale."

Armisdale, to do him justice, was an impressive figure. The brow, from which long, unparted, greying hair receded in a thick mat, was massive; the nose trim and short; a small fierce moustache and neat pointed beard, gave an exotic touch to the face. Though he was not remarkably tall, his extraordinary slimness of body added something to his height. Of his many vanities this slimness was perhaps his dearest, and one which he courted by careful tailoring: the beautifully cut morning coat

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allowed the admirer to see that it followed rather than clung to the lines of his body. His appearance was such as to win a glance of interest from the judge, while the angelic *garde-du-corps* agitated and rustled in their pleasure. As a witness he was admirable : terse to the nicest point. He had led the Turkestan Expedition, he said : he had visited such and such places. (There was much shuffling of maps and pointing of fingers.) He had been two years on his journey. No, he had had no white men in his company, only bearers. Dangers ? He shrugged his shoulders ; it had been perhaps a trifle dangerous—Tartar brigands and so forth, escaped convicts ; he told a story of how he had put down a mutiny, told it well, implying more than he said. Yes, his report had been accepted by various learned societies. He feared he was not as good a cartographer as he might be ; there had been points on his map which on subsequent investigation he had rectified. The answers came smooth and pat. Mr. Justice Redruth laid down his pen, leaned his fine chin upon his fine hand and examined with an impartial eye the ladies in the auditorium.

Plaintiff's counsel then led Armisdale round to Stephen Retallick's book. Lord Armisdale admitted he had known Stephen Retallick. He had liked him well enough, had rather not give his opinion of him as a rival in the field, "*de mortuis*," and so forth, was persuaded to say that he thought poor Retallick touched in the head, as would be natural in a much applauded man with no background (faintly indicating the long line of Scottish

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barons and knights in his own ancestry) ; of the defendants, he knew only Mr. Ord, quite casually, members of the same club, knew no reason for his fastening a quarrel on him. The examination finished, Sir Gamaliel, slightly more purple, sank back into his bandanna handkerchief.

"Have you heard about the card table incident ?" whispered Martin. "No ? I'll tell you later."

Roderick Dare rose to cross-examine. He looked at his adversary coldly and asked :

"You are a naturalist, I believe, Lord Armisdale ?"

"Yes : that is so."

"Written books about birds, I think ?"

"One or two."

"On page 346 of your book you describe certain birds that you saw at a certain point in your journey."

"Yes."

"Were they common ? You speak of flocks ?"
Armisdale hesitated.

"If I said flocks, I should think, yes."

"Would it surprise you to learn that the birds you describe have never been seen east of a point a thousand miles from where you say you were ?"

"Naturally, since I have seen them."

Roderick Dare hardly waited for the answer.

"Turning to page 401," he went on, "I find you describe platinum as a common metal of the region."

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"I dare say. It is."

"Not according to the latest reports of the mining experts, Lord Armidsale."

"Then they have not been there."

"They mention an area covering the exact latitude and longitude."

"In that case," returned Armisdale coldly, "I must bow to their knowledge. I dare say my information, which I based on what I believed to be trustworthy sources, is wrong. It may not have been platinum."

"Thank you. I think that is all, Lord Armisdale. Oh, no, one other question. Do you know Simon Johnson? No? Thank you."

Armisdale bowed to the judge and left the box. He was followed by two experts, neither of whom had ever been in the region spoken of, but who testified to their belief, as experts, in the plaintiff's statements. That, said Charters, K.C., was Lord Armisdale's case, and the court rose for lunch.

Roderick Dare lunched with them very sparingly. He said little but, as Robert Ord paid the bill, he admonished his client:

"I know it does not look much to demolish, but there are breakers ahead. Charters relies on digging some expression of malice out of you, and if you let your dear old principles go, we might as well shut up shop."

Robert Ord fidgeted, growled and looked as much like a small schoolboy caught out in mischief as is possible for a man weighing seventeen stone.

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"Well, don't let old Charters get your goat. He'll try," warned his counsel, as he hitched up his gown and departed.

Martin watched Armisdale while they waited for the judge's entry. He stood very much at his ease, talking and laughing, looking unspeakable secrets from his eyes at each member of his bevy in turn, and using every now and then an exaggerated foreign gesture. A good fake, a very good fake, Martin concluded, quite a genuine old master.

The first person called for the defence was Owen Seagrave. He was examined briefly by Barker, the defendants' junior. He had had nothing to do with the selection of the manuscript. It had been handed him by Mr. Ord to put into order for press, correct the spelling, check names, etc. He perspired a great deal as he ejaculated the replies and his nose got redder. When Sir Gamaliel rose to cross-examine, it was obvious that he intended to bully his witness. He took him over the passages complained of. He was an editor: had it not struck him that to speak so of Lord Armisdale was highly unorthodox?

"No," replied Seagrave, quivering. "That is—er—no."

"You know what libel is, Mr. Seagrave?"

"Oh yes . . . yes."

"And this . . . Come now, Mr. Seagrave, when you saw it, were you not surprised?"

"Yes. . . . that is, yes, I was."

"And why then didn't you show it to your employer?"

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"Oh, I did—I showed it to Mr. Ord." Seagrave turned scarlet and stopped dead.

"Oh, you *did* show it to Mr. Ord. And what did Mr. Ord say?"

"He said: 'Go ahead: that's all right.'"

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You are quite sure? Come now, Mr. Seagrave, Mr. Ord neither said anything else nor did anything else?"

"Nothing, sir, at all. He just" Mr. Seagrave stopped dead and looked more perturbed than ever.

"Come now, Mr. Seagrave, you are here to give evidence. What were you going to say? Answer me."

"Please do not waste time, Mr. Seagrave," interposed the judge. "You must answer counsel's question. What did occur?"

"Well, Mr. Ord sort of chuckled."

"Chuckled! And nothing more?"

"Nothing more whatever, sir, upon my word of honour."

At last Sir Gamaliel let him go. Roderick Dare did not re-examine and Mr. Seagrave fled from the court to the bar where he struggled to compose his agitation with large draughts of gin.

Seagrave was followed by Ormiston who added nothing to the evidence but concluded by informing the world that it was only an ancient legal swindle that brought him there at all, after which Roderick Dare said, "Call Simon Johnson."

A lean, brown, insignificant man, with a faint

brown moustache bleached by long exposure, made his way to the box. Martin was struck by his eyes, a very pale blue, with that impersonal distant gaze that a life in the open air gives a man. His voice was soft; his enunciation slow: his composure seemed completely automatic. He explained that he was the naturalist who had accompanied Retallick on his last journey, and told the tale of the expedition in the matter of fact way of a man describing a motor run to Bath. They had taken Armisdale's book with them, and he agreed that for the first three hundred miles of the journey the account tallied with their observations. Naturally, said Johnson, for it was an ordinary trade route. It was after this that the trouble began. Retallick and Johnson, on the third day after they left the trail, had examined Armisdale's directions in the light of the map they had plotted and their own observations. "At the end Stephen looks over to me and he sa-ays, 'This chap's a liar, Simon, he's never been he-ere.' Ay, I mind it well. 'A blüdy liar,' he says. An' after that, of course, he was alwa-ys finding mistakes." He went on to explain that owing to the inaccuracies of Armisdale's alleged survey, they were badly delayed and in consequence had to turn back with their final goal unachieved, before winter set in. Retallick had died on the way down and Johnson had buried him in what was now set out on the map as Stephen Gorge. Roderick Dare asked him whether they had seen any birds. "No, sir, nobbut a few kites and vultures, and they had a hard life to pick up a meal, I reckon."

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“None of these described by Lord Armisdale?”

Johnson struck his hand impatiently on the barrier.

“No. They birds never came north of the Karakoram. Why should they?” And Roderick sat down.

Charters knew he had a tough nut to crack in this immovable witness. He realized that so far it was a drawn battle and that to win he must prove deliberate malice towards Armisdale, but lure he never so wilily, he could extract little.

Had Mr. Retallick ever met Lord Armisdale? Not so far as Johnson knew. Had he ever expressed any comment on the plaintiff? None, until they discovered the mis-information in the book. And after that? Stephen Retallick had expressed himself rather freely after that. So Retallick had then displayed considerable animus against Lord Armisdale, eh? Yes, but only as an explorer. What had he said? Johnson admitted he could not recall exactly. One phrase only stuck in his memory: it was uttered about a day before Retallick died, when he was telling Johnson to take his diaries to Robert Ord. And that was? Here the witness exhibited a certain reluctance, but under pressure, “Saving the ladies’ presence and his lordship’s, Stephen said, ‘I’ll whip that bastard poop till his shirt’s wet, sending honest men to their death.’” In the midst of a suppressed titter, Armisdale hurriedly turned and plucked his counsel’s sleeve, after which Simon Johnson was permitted to depart. A few minutes later Lord Armisdale retired to the back of the court and squeezed his narrow form between

those of two of his admirers. The usher called for Robert Ord.

Martin almost cheered as his father mounted the steps to the witness box : he could see that the witness was in an aggressive mood ; the blood had mounted to his face and he almost snapped the oath out of the clerk of the court's mouth, before he turned his broad Harcourtian face towards his counsel. He was Robert Ord, the publisher of the book in question, and moreover, the literary executor of his old friend, Stephen Retallick. He had read the diaries with considerable interest and had considered that they should be printed in their complete form so as to offer the greatest advantages to people interested. He considered that that was his duty. No, he had no personal animus against Lord Armisdale. He had known him very slightly over a number of years. That was all. Dare made way for Sir Gamaliel. The crowd in the court shifted and tightened their muscles in deference to the champions about to engage. The jury were whispering among themselves. A fat jurymen in the corner leaned back, folded his arms and frowned majestically.

"Mr. Seagrave tells us that when he drew your attention to the passages in question, you chuckled ?"

"I dare say I may have."

"You were amused, Mr. Ord. At what, may I ask ?"

"I don't recall exactly. Very probably at my old friend, so to speak, rising from the dead to give the lie to a humbug."

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“Then you did have a personal animus against Lord Armisdale?”

“None more than I would have to any other man who deceived the world by posing as an expert.” Robert Ord’s eyes danced. He did not like Charters.

“But would not the effect you desired have been secured a little less blatantly, if I may use the adverb—for instance by the excision of one or two of these singularly offensive passages?”

“No.”

“Less good for your pocket, I suppose?”

“Far from it. As a matter of fact, all the profits of the sale go to the writer’s heirs.”

“Ah, I see. So you thought that perhaps most money would accrue from a succès de scandale if it could be brought about?”

“That point of view had not entered my head.”

“Then why did you not have those passages taken out, when the construction that any ordinary man would put upon them was pointed out to you?”

“Because I do not believe in mutilating books. It destroys the writer’s personality.”

“Surely a very curious doctrine?”

“A doctrine which has been held by one much more worthy than myself.” The witness turned very fierce and rolled out—“‘He who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the Image of God as it were in the eye.’”

Sir Gamaliel shrugged his shoulders.

“I am afraid I cannot follow your rhetoric, Mr.

Ord." Robert Ord looked at him for a moment with his mouth open, and then said, "Good God, next you'll be calling *Othello* verse . . . I beg your lordship's pardon," whereupon Mr. Justice Redruth proffered him a bland smile and said, "For the instruction of the jury, the witness's quotation is from the *Areopagitica* of John Milton, a famous English writer. Pray proceed, Sir Gamaliel."

Sir Gamaliel, who had shrugged his shoulders at all this fine talk, now indulged in the tactics of suggestion. He suggested very gradually, stealthily creeping closer and closer to his objective, the admission by the witness of some small feeling which might allow the pursuing counsel to pounce suddenly and draw an inference of spiteful intention. Robert Ord replied with a series of stoical negatives, until at last counsel said, "So there is nothing, there never has been anything approaching ill-feeling on your part towards the plaintiff," whereupon the witness for the first time appeared to hesitate.

"No . . . that is . . . no."

"Come, Mr. Ord, there is something at the back of your mind." (Martin almost squealed with delight. It was coming: it was coming.)

"Nothing at all since a small incident at a card table nearly five and twenty years ago." (Martin could see Armisdale frantically trying to attract his counsel's notice, but his counsel's back remained unconscious.)

"And that?"

"I told Philip Cameron, as he then was, that he ought to learn the ordinary conventions of the

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whist-table among gentlemen and he threw the cards in my face."

"Oh, and this is your revenge, I suppose?" sneered Charters.

"Far from it. I punished him at once. I put him under the table and sat on it. The table I am sorry to say was broken. It cost me five pounds, but Cameron had to pay the stakes."

The reluctant narrative of the transaction with its startling ending was too much for the court. A roar of laughter greeted it in which it is to be regretted the witness joined heartily. Even the judge permitted himself a faint smile. Only Armisdale flashed lightning from his eyes, while Sir Gamaliel waved frenziedly at the witness to leave the box.

After the commotion had subsided, both the leaders addressed the court, the plaintiff's in rasping indignation, the defendants' with matter-of-fact coldness. Mr. Justice Redruth then took up the running; with great ceremony he recited the incidents of the case, went over the law, spoke of "fair comment," "justification," "malice," quoted a Horatian tag and a dictum of Bloody Jeffreys, and dispatched the jury to consider their verdict. After which he closed his eyes, and let the animalculæ before him buzz. Martin tried to gain opinions from his aunt, from Ambrose, from his uncle's junior who shook his head and ventured that it might be worse; but you could never tell with a jury; a jury always went back on you; it was axiomatic. Four-thirty passed, four forty-five: five was drawing near before the twelve good men

and true filed in with aspects of pallid determination ; and the judge opened his eyes.

“ Are you all agreed upon your verdict ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Do you find for the plaintiff or for the defendant ? ”

“ For the plaintiff.”

“ Have you considered the amount of the damages ? ”

“ Yes. One farthing.”

Martin was so overcome by the finding for the plaintiff that he hardly realized that Roderick Dare was shaking his father warmly by the hand, that Mr. Wisborough was jumping up and down like a dancing dog, that Seagrave had burst into spirituous tears and that even Ambrose was grinning. He heard the hoarse voice of Sir Gamaliel Charters demanding costs, and saw Lord Armisdale bullying his solicitor, and at last understood that the verdict was better than anyone had hoped.

“ Your father did it, my boy,” Mr. Barker told him. “ That story at the end of his evidence just swung the jury over. Trust an English jury to like a scrap. That was what pulled them.”

They got out into the corridors somehow. Roderick Dare was saying, “ You’re an old reprobate, but, by gum, you’re an artist. You couldn’t have caught Charters more neatly.”

His father turned to Martin and said, “ Take your aunt home, my boy. I’ll see you later. I must go up to Jonquil’s.”

In the car on the way home, Martin found time to inquire after Deborah.

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"She seems quite happy," his aunt replied, "though I must say that Brian seems to be a somewhat negligible young man. However, she appears contented, except that she is afraid he'll go to France very soon. Poor young things."

"Oh, I expect he'll survive," said Martin callously.

"I suppose you will have to go soon. There will be none but us aged men and women left. Do you know, Martin, I often used to wish that you would marry Deborah. It would have pleased me immensely. You used to be such great friends."

His aunt's artless remark stabbed Martin, but he sat tight and merely said, "Oh yes, but never anything more, you know."

A maid met them at the door and told Mrs. Dare that she was wanted urgently on the telephone. When she came back, her face was very white.

"Martin dear, there is bad news of your father. He has had a slight stroke at his solicitors'. It is all right now; a doctor has seen him and they are bringing him here, but he has had a very severe shock and will have to stay with us till he is fit to move."

Martin sat down quickly; he felt slightly sick, but pulled himself together and asked a question.

"Oh no, no. There is no danger: only he will have to have a lot of rest and attention. They say the excitement of the trial must have caused it. Wait in the smoking-room while I see about his room."

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They brought Robert Ord to the house about sunset. He was very white and drawn ; he could not speak, but he caught his son's eye and essayed the ghost of a smile as they carried him through the hall. Martin went back to the smoking-room, flung himself into a chair and burst into tears.

CHAPTER VI

GRADUALLY it became clear that Robert Ord would never be the same man. The seizure had struck the strength from his body ; and though he could still work, his limbs were very feeble. He could move for a short time about the room, but he soon had to return to his couch. His brain was hardly affected : only, it had lost the magnificent power of concentration for long periods together that once had permitted him to work for days and nights at a stretch with the minimum of sleep and food. Now even negligible conversation tired him ; his thoughts would wander away into the past, which in compensation, perhaps, came floating back to him scented and radiant, burdened with a wealth of detail unconsciously assimilated in the days of its being.

They took him down to Salley Bushes, and made of his library a room where he might lie to view his books and his garden, watch the grey river's steady march and smell the scents of earth and leaf, death and life mingled, stealing in through the jalousies.

Frances Dare came to live with him. It had been easy to arrange, for her husband accepted one of those war-necessitated roving commissions of inspection and report that exiled him to the marches

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of Britain for days and weeks at a time. He was easily persuaded to get rid of his London home, and to make, in his brief intervals of rest, his headquarters at the quiet riverside house.

After he had recovered a little, Robert Ord attempted to continue his work of revising the great mediæval dictionary, but even this exhausted him. Tears rolled down his face at his last attempt, when he understood that it would not be given him to finish his master work. He might have died then and there when the emptiness of his existence was borne in on him, had not Martin found a solution.

Mr. Quarles, Martin had discovered, was in the middle of a fight to the death with Ambrose. He had rejected without explanation the latest work of a certain novelist with a vogue. He had vouchsafed no comment, simply returned the manuscript with a rejection slip. The famous novelist—many are famous, if few are great : fame is double-edged—incensed at so cavalier a treatment, called upon Ambrose, and blew up. Ambrose, fearing that so tempestuous a person as the famous author might well begin blackening the name of Ord, sent for Quarles and demanded his justification. A most unfortunate scene had occurred. Instead of pacifying the outraged writer, Horatio Quarles had delivered a brief lecture on grammar, syntax, construction and other allied subjects, had, in fact, given his aggressor a thorough wiggling, and concluded by upbraiding him most unjustifiably for laying his plot in the forbidden territory of Cornwall. He had thereupon bowed and disappeared

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before his victim could recover his breath. The upshot of this interlude had been that Ambrose had sulked, Quarles had sulked, and the incensed author had trumpeted his views on the firm of Ord in every bar and café he frequented, to the sympathetic ears but secret delight of his confidants. Since matters between Quarles and Ambrose had reached an impasse, Martin suggested that the ex-scholar should be transferred to Salley Bushes and take up the revision of Ducange under his father's eye. The proposal delighted all parties, and in a few weeks Horatio Quarles with his humble equipment was installed in the house, where, under his patron's eye he daily searched and researched, willingly bowing to criticism and impatience, in the hope that the curious points of mediæval lore would medicine to the sick man's spirit a desire to live.

Ambrose soon found a substitute for Quarles, in a tractable, sweet-tempered consumptive with a large family, and even succeeded in renewing his acquaintance with the ruffled author. The excellent cooking at his house, supervised by Sybil, was a noble viaticum to the burial of quarrels. The trouble and stress of the first nine months of the war from the point of view of housekeeping had put the hostess upon her mettle. Her ambition for Ambrose made it doubly imperative that nothing should be allowed to disturb him, and so with heroic persistence, she besieged stores, stormed provision counters, and returned to Hampstead laden with provender. Beyond the increase in the price of victuals, the war touched her not. She had snapped sharply at the phrase "Business as usual,"

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and at her house no more than the faintest grimace of the horror without was visible through the curtains. True, she talked a lot about her war work, her gifts, her committees, what the Duchess had said, and how Lady So-and-so had complimented her on her speech. She felt with justification that if any reward came to them out of this catastrophe, it would be as much her due as her husband's. Ambrose was working harder than ever. The constant wastage of his staff had to be made good by ignorants, by incompetents, by slovens, and, in training them, he was using every ounce of nerve and brain. In spite of his father's opposition, Ambrose was very level headed and extremely far-seeing. He had based a complete commercial campaign on the view that the war would last three years at least. He foresaw a greater and greater scarcity of commodities, an increasing width of the armed front (had not Zeppelins raided the country?), less and less amusement, and a new public with money to spend, often deprived of sensation, and so willing to accept it vicariously in books. Things were not going too badly, he told Martin and Dan Palliser one night when Martin was on leave: trade was brisk and, if prices were rising, his were not going up so fast as other firms. He had bought up a small paper mill at a bargain price and hoped to keep himself supplied at close rates to the end.

"Extraordinary fellow," remarked Daniel, as they groped their way down Haverstock Hill. "When Ambrose gets to hell, he'll float a company for lowering the price of coal without loss of

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temperature. Now I must go off to my ridiculous vigil."

He produced a policeman's armlet and a truncheon from his tail coat pocket.

"A terrible weapon, my dear Martin, to entrust to anyone as unhandy as myself, and ruinous to the clothes. My poor old friend Armitage and I stroll wearily round St. James's Park three nights a week in terror of catching some nefarious traitor with a bomb in his hat. Armitage was never very bright, so we discuss food and plan little dinners. I had no idea how prosy one could get on the subject of cutlets."

"Does nothing ever happen?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. What would you expect to happen in St. James's Park between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m.? Though, upon my word, we nearly had an adventure the other night. Armitage has a passion for fresh fish and last Tuesday brought down a night line in the hopes of securing one of His Majesty's trout, I presume. He got his tackle out quite safely, but two of those foolish birds got caught up on it in the dark. You never heard such a din. It was close on relief time, so Armitage scrambled down the bank and pulled his line in with the birds on it still yelling. Just as he got them, the bank gave way, and when our relief turned up with its sergeant in charge—an elderly marquis—there was Armitage up to his knees in the water with a duck under either arm. It took a great deal of explaining, I assure you, a great deal . . . and I had to run Armitage all the way to the Athenæum where he stays on those occasions. We

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had great difficulty in explaining the pool of water on the steps to the night porter—I believe he thought it was blood. This kind of thing will be my death.”

Martin returned to his battalion on Salisbury Plain. Almost daily, changes were taking place in the personnel of the officers ; the older men were being transferred to home service battalions ; a new colonel made his appearance, a new second in command. Training grew stiffer and stiffer. Rifles had now been served out and the last man fitted out in khaki and equipment. The stiff physical work and the responsibility were having a hardening effect on Martin. His platoon, his little kingdom of fifty odd souls, occupied all his thoughts. Day and night he laboured with the diffident, the awkward, to bring them to the pitch of perfection. Obstinate he sweated over young lance-corporals whose brains never lit up with the divine spark of comprehension at the simplest of facts. He spent ten blazing days on the Bulford ranges, starting at six, marching seven or eight miles, grilling all day beneath the furious sun, and returning through the evening dews, weary and contented. He had no time for daydreams now, and his tired body sunk him so deep in healthy sleep that his nights were empty. In the middle of July, he had a letter from Deborah. She had left Dover and was in rooms in London. Would he give her a dinner ?

Would he ? Gladly. The pangs which had followed his thwarting of nine months back, had left him. The open-air, calm life had healed his

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wounds. Were they only skin deep after all? He felt he could meet his cousin with an untroubled heart. Even the sight of her when they met cast on him no more than a faint shadow of regret that it was not his body that would lie so close to hers that night.

Deborah looked well and her greeting was so spontaneously glad, that it was sufficient to disguise any sorrow that might be hidden behind that smooth brow. As they went into the restaurant, he asked after her husband. Was it his own fancy or did a tiny frown for one second graze her forehead?

"Brian? Brian is at Dover—very well—still assistant adjutant."

"So you are on leave?" he asked.

"No. I'm here as a permanency. Father wangled me into a job in the Ministry of Information—Intelligence Branch, mind you, and I cipher, translate and index daily from ten till five . . . but let me look at you, Martin. Yes, you do me credit, my dear. Very lean and brown, and, I believe, older and even more serious. Do you know that this is the first time I have seen you in an officer's uniform? The last time was . . ." she hesitated, but drove herself to finish steadily, "the night of Mike's farewell party."

"But," asked Martin, "why on earth are you doing this work? Surely it's unnecessary? You ought to be looking after Brian." He shot his last sentence deliberately, in the hope of getting an illuminating answer: but Deborah was ready. She laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"Because, my dear, two persons cannot live on

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a subaltern's pay in England. My allowance? A lot of that went west when father took on this commission. It meant the end of his Bar practice and he won't take a penny except his bare expenses for what he is doing. So . . . well, debts began to mount, and things began to look pretty black. Not that Brian or I are exactly frugal in our tastes. So at last, I decided to get a job and keep myself until things are better. They pay me four pounds a week, so I'm pretty lucky."

"Where are you living?"

Deborah grimaced.

"In the most awful rooms near the White City, 17 Bulmer Place, with the most terrifying old hag in charge who feeds me with opalescent bacon and solid eggs—solid, because the flavour is less repellent that way. There is a charming young thing on the floor above—swept out on to the streets when they closed the Empire promenade. So quiet, but it is rather a bore when she brings some man home at two o'clock in the morning. They always seem very careless about their boots and bang them on my ceiling."

"Good God!" exclaimed Martin, "this is awful."

"It isn't anything of the kind," declared Deborah with spirit. "Or at least, it might be far worse. When I get some more money, I'll move, I promise you I will."

"Let me lend you some." The thought shot into his mind that Deborah was supplying her husband from her own small earnings.

"Certainly not. You can give me a dinner every now and then when you're in London."

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"What hopes. We shall be in France in a fortnight."

"Oh, Martin, how dreadful. I didn't know—a fortnight."

"Never mind, you shall dine with me on my embarkation leave. That is next Saturday night;—and on the first night of my first leave. Will you? Promise?"

"I promise," she said, and held her hand across the table. She shook her head to stop the tears coming. Martin took the little hand between his square brown ones. It was worth much peril to have Deborah look at him like that again. He released her fingers, and sought another subject.

"When's your husband going out?" he asked. "I thought he would have joined Mike long ago?"

Deborah shook her head.

"I don't know," she said a little wearily. "I don't want Brian to go, but I sometimes feel he ought to when all these children are being dispatched day after day. There's one little lad who has been out three times, and come back wounded twice—only nineteen. But Brian is supposed to be indispensable, so he'll stay at Dover for the duration, I take it."

Deborah saw him off at Waterloo. He climbed moodily into a first class carriage and gloomed through the dreary hours to Ludgershall. He groaned to think of his cousin tied to this fellow Sharlow, groaned so loudly that he startled an elderly major at his side, who glared at him with such suspicion that Martin came back to conscious-

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ness, and, mentally damning Brian Sharlow, joined a fellow subaltern in a game of piquet.

Deborah, alone on the top of a bus, shivered in spite of the warm night. The war seemed infinite, a long dark corridor, down which one groped from prop to prop—days, with, seemingly, no glimmer of an end in the distance. Perhaps, when the end came, it would be worse than this dazed and drugged struggle through the recesses. She knew now that she was not in love with her husband : she had been to all purposes, seduced, lawfully and ecclesiastically. Brian was, as men would say, not a bad fellow ; he had a superficial charm ; he talked glibly and, to those who met him for the first time, well ; but she knew all his stock in trade now and just how shallow the shop behind the bright window. He was not unkind : only—he was easy going, reckless about money, drank just a little too much—very much too much on guest nights, when he would come home flushed and desirous. Perhaps it was only the war made him so : they were all living an unnatural life, letting their bodies rip to steady their nerves. Perhaps with peace would come a calmer, quieter existence, the opportunity for garnering life to make up for this spendthrift existence. At least they could try—but now, it was hopeless. A plunge of thought brought her to Martin. Until they had met that evening, she had given him little consideration during these last months. Looked at to-night, she thought he seemed so much older, so much more solid and reliable than she remembered, and fresh and clean. With a rush, she realized that she would

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only see him once again before he went out : it might so easily be the last time. The fancy shook her. She bit the back of her hand to stop herself crying out. She would not, she promised herself, believe it. Martin would come back and one day their life would resume on the terms of their long friendship. But did she quite think of Martin in terms of friendship ? Habit dulls the perception and she was not sure herself how she regarded him. A friend ? No. An elder brother ? No. A constant companion ? The more she dwelt on it, the more she was driven to the inevitable ditch : but at the last moment, she refused, threw up her head, and resolutely shook herself free, glad that the arrival of the bus excused her from pondering any longer.

Yet, in spite of her determination, the image of Martin was continually reappearing at odd moments during the next week. Irritated, she vanished it, and almost telegraphed to him that she would be unable to see him that Saturday night. Instead she promised herself to be as careless and as hard as is possible in a girl of twenty ; than which agate is not less brittle.

Martin had his three days embarkation leave, and spent two of them with his father at Salley Bushes. He was glad to say good-bye. The atmosphere in his home had changed. It was a house of age. The inhabitants were immeasurably distant from him. The world was rolling beneath their feet, bearing them one way and him the other. The farewells were those of the mutually condemned, one to the cup, the other to the dagger ;

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and they felt that all they were saying were simply polite courtesies, that their real emotions, and those half envious for the other's fate, could not, would not, must not come forth. The stress of these suppressions fatigued him. He felt tired and jaded as he waited in the foyer for Deborah. Unconsciously he looked to her youthful vitality to lend him its aid to recover his vigour. When she appeared, slim and caparisoned, he caught her hand in an ecstasy of happiness : and from Deborah, all her scruples fell in one moment. They secured a table in a corner and sat side by side.

"You look tired, my dear," she said.

"I wanted you," he said simply. "I shan't be tired now." He described to her his farewells, how cold they had seemed, how ineffectual. "As if we were marble monuments in a church, of which one was being removed to grace some other edifice. It is curious how these partings hurt, and yet we can never express to the other sharer of it just what we want to say." He looked up and met Deborah's candid eyes. He felt their directness and understood the message they had for him, but wilfully he refused it : and she, seeing the refusal in his glance, turned her head. After that they avoided circumspectly all indications of his going away. What, in any case, was the use ? They had only an hour or so. It was better to leave unsaid avowals which they knew had no need to be uttered. Both were at root, decent, bourgeois children, instinct with the creeds and codes in which they had been educated. At times of stress, a Calvinistic clinging to those creeds would force them to repress

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thoughts which, in lighter hours, would have run free. So they sat side by side desperately picking up topics, turning them over, showing each other already well observed marks, and relinquishing them only when a further examination became ridiculous, to search feverishly for some other object to carry them a little farther along the beach of time. At last, Martin dared to look at his watch, and say that he must go. Deborah turned her face pitifully towards him, beseechingly. Her hand lay tentatively beside his. He took no notice and wasted some minutes paying the bill, but her hand was still there when he had finished. He laid his upon it. She turned her palm upwards and caught his fingers quickly.

"You *will* come back, Martin, I know you will," she whispered as if the phrase—uttered by how many thousands of women?—was an immutable decree to God.

"Of course I shall," said Martin—in the selfsame tone of how many thousand soldiers? They got up and made their way through the streets.

"Taxi, sir?"—but Martin shook his head. In the collusive darkness of a cab, emotional collapse cannot be defied with the stoicism demanded by the Underground or a bus.

They shouldered their way through the mob pouring on the platforms. Martin noticed a girl weeping on the shoulder of a subaltern in his battalion; an older woman crying equally painfully in the arms of an elderly colonel, a couple of shrill-voiced jades keeping up the spirits of a party of well-wined officers, and a quartet of privates from

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his own company dancing an intricate saraband with four shawled and feathered dames to the music of a mouth organ and much raucous chaff. He looked at the clock and saw, thankfully, that he had only three minutes.

"I must run," he said to the girl at his side.

"Oh, Martin, yes." He turned to her and for a moment they clung together. "Good-bye, my dear, dear Martin" . . . "My dear, dear Deb." A quick hand-grasp and he was running up the platform. Deborah ground her heel against the pavement. Then, squaring her shoulders, she turned about and marched out of the station.

CHAPTER VII

THERE are numerous men to whom war is the worst of evils, a great hulking, rough bully, smashing men and their work with spiteful malevolence, with bursts of *schadenfreude*, a nightmare giant, a thing accursed, to be fought with all the bitterness of word and tongue. In their injury they conjure up, as they so easily can, a terrifying kaleidoscope picture of dead and wounded, struggling bodies, blood, mud and guts, of paralysed brains and mutilated limbs, of insensate noise, of overwhelming terror. Because they are the most exasperated, they are the most vociferous. On the reverse is a smaller group of individuals who seem to enjoy even the worst atrocities of that tossed and seething world, men perhaps spiritually subnormal, who need these draughts of sensuous stimulant to wake them to life. Most of them are comparatively inarticulate; they remain silent, chewing their romantic cud and hankering moodily after days that will never come back. Between these two classes lies a vast mass of indifferents, men who have, without confessing it, learned that in peace as in war, life is made up of exquisite pleasure and noxious beastliness and frustration, men who understand that death by shell-fire, by cancer or by starvation are equal varieties of the

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price life exacts from us, the price one must pay for what is called civilization; and that there are compensations. A partridge you have shot on the wire at dawn stand to and retrieved by yourself with infinite pains in no little danger, tastes infinitely better than the indifferent cut-off-the-joint-and-two-veg served to you in a greasy urban chop house; that to wake each day (or night) to know that at least your food, your clothing, your medical needs, your wife and children are all cared for at the price of your life, or your limbs, is better than hewing coal in the underworld, your stomach crying and echoing the stomachs of your children and your wife, with probably "another on the way," or ageing swiftly at your desk, knowing that in ten, five or one year you will be reckoned too old and will be cast, dismissed, not even to grass like an old horse, but to the filthy flagstones of the town. Small things, you say, to set against the *chambarde-ment générale*? But life is made up of such atoms. In war you learn the definite pleasure of living for no more than the day, the hour or the minute, in rest billets, on the approach march, in the line. No need to think for the future: that pays for muddy food, for chlorinated water, for cramped and wearied limbs, for sleepless nights, for overdriven days, for the fear of the rifle grenade, the "minnie" and the shell. In such vicissitudes, men grow, like animals, a protective shell, a padded overskin, calloused and hardened, through which the terrors of the uninitiated lose their power and only impinge on an indifferent, stupefied mind with half their cruelty enforced.

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Martin became a fair specimen of these last. The breaking-in of his battalion was easy. They landed early in August, marched with blistered feet and sweating bodies over miles of uneven pavé, beneath blazing suns, slept in barns or fields, came to the peaceful town of Armentières, still thriving in spite of the desultory shells dropped into the square, and up the Houplines road. Here they underwent a brief education in the rat-infested, sand-bagged lines at the hands of experts—of a comic warfare in which it was apparently *de rigueur* for everyone to get up on the fire-step at some moment of the night and blaze off cartridges for sixty seconds, to cheer wildly, and, as soon as the enemy had replied with an equally harmless display, to retire to the nightly duties of repairing parapets and wire. The gunners took no obvious interest in these childish sports of the infantry and spent their days shooting at places where they were likely to do least harm.

A month after they landed, the Swallowtails were sent south to relieve the French, beyond Arras, a pleasant, rolling pastoral country, where it was said that there had been many sanguinary battles earlier in the year, but they found little evidence of it. The peasants still lived within a mile of the lines; ploughing went on among the battery positions; eggs were sold cheerfully at not too rasping a price: only a few shell-holed barns, and one village, which had ventured too close to the front line, proudly displayed their mutilation like veterans of war. The Swallowtails relieved a regiment of cuirassiers, who looked as helpless dismounted as any tin

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soldiers ; they wore rusty breastplates and tall brass helmets covered with a khaki envelope below which dangled the tails of horsehair plumes. They were very cheerful ; and Martin was assured that the Boche was very quiet and gentlemanly, "*de messieurs, assurancement.*" But however gentlemanly the enemy had been in the past, he appeared to resent the arrival of British troops on his front. The first three days were of the pleasantest tranquillity. Not a gun was fired, and the silence was only broken by the slow traversing of the parapets by a rhythmical machine-gun. On the fourth, however, the Sleeping Beauty of the German guns in the wood opposite had obviously been kissed by Prince Hindenburg, for Martin had a lively ten minutes while shells flew over and about his hundred yards of trench. He was relieved to find no damage whatever done, and was glad to discover that he was not as frightened as he had anticipated. All the same he did not share in his platoon sergeant's derision of the German shooting : it would not always be like that, and their next tour of duty in this trench dispelled any illusions there might have been on the matter. It started after breakfast on a fine October morning with a little burst of machine-gun firing and a salvo from a battery of field guns. Almost immediately afterwards Martin's elbow was grasped by Sergeant Peppercorn, who uttered in an amazed voice : "'struth, look at that, sir !"

Martin, who was inspecting a rifle barrel, looked up and saw advancing towards them through the air two large shining objects. They seemed to

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climb slowly, with creaks and protesting whistlings, to a point high above their heads, and then, with a malevolent swiftness, fell behind the trench. A second later a gigantic double explosion rent the air and earth ; and a thousand objects left there by the careless French, old tins, rags, boots, offal, as well as bits of evil jagged steel, were tossed in a dark spray and fell in a cloud on the party.

"The great twin brethren, by Jove!" exclaimed Martin, crouching and coughing against the wall: but the allusion was lost on Sergeant Peppercorn who was running up the trench pulling men out of shelters to stand up and dodge the giant "minnies."

Already the second pair of shells were advancing portentously on their way. This time they were more accurate and fell squarely on the junction of the front line and the communication trench ; after which, the platoon spent a harassed half hour on its legs dodging to and fro as the monstrous engines fell with terrible inevitability and accuracy on the ditch that held them.

"Rats, that's what we are, bloody rats in a drain," panted stout Corporal Jennings as he pattered to and fro. "Stand steady, lads. It's—all—right. Left—no, right—no, left. Quick."

Another gigantic explosion shook them.

"Where's our bleeding artillery?" snarled a lean, sallow lance-corporal, a tremendous anarchist in private life. "Talk about our ruddy organization? Cawnt nobody do nothing? That's what I want to know."

"'Ere she comes again . . . Look out! . . . Over!"

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A cry of "Stretcher-bearer—stretcher-bear-er," wailed along the trench.

"Where was that?" asked Martin.

"Down on the left, sir, by the old latrine."

Martin ran down the gully, stooping, for in many places very little was left of the parapet. One enormous hole with the earth banked to the ground level caused him to hoist himself out into full view of the enemy, but no shot followed. At his trench end he came on a head and shoulders, the face pallid, and yellow with explosive, the body buried by the fall of a traverse which had reeled over under the shock and pinned the crouching man beneath it. The voice continued to call and scream; the mouth twisted and dribbled. Martin found a shovel and started to dig.

"It's all right, man, all right," he cried as he worked, but the voice never paused in its shouting and wail, nor the body to struggle frantically under the mound of red clay. Two stretcher-bearers appeared and flung themselves on the work of extrication. They heard another "minnie" humming its cheerful menace.

"Look out," cried someone sharply, and ducked. Before Martin could move, there was the thud of the bomb hitting the ground, followed immediately by the explosion. He was seized by a giant whirlwind, thrown against the trench wall and then banged face downwards on the earth. Sick and shaken, he lay there for a moment, until he heard the stretcher-bearer's voice saying:

"Are you hurt, chum . . . sir, I mean?"

"No . . . all right, Jones, only winded."

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The half-buried man who had been silenced by the shock of the explosion, now began to call and scream once more. Martin staggered to his feet, intent only on freeing the man and stopping his nerve-racking row.

"For God's sake, stop his mouth, can't you," he gasped at the stretcher-bearer viciously as he plied his shovel.

"'E don't know 'e's screaming, sir," answered Jones. "Ear drums gone, I fancy."

At last they got the doleful body out, and laid it trembling on a stretcher. Martin was only just able to recognize the drawn and earth-clotted figure as one of a new draft, only three days with them. He watched the bearers negotiate the broken end of the communication trench, and staggered along to find his platoon sergeant. The *minenwerfer* had — most unaccountably — ceased shooting. There seemed no reason why it should not have gone on all day. The men were excitedly talking over their first experience of war, and laughing uneasily at the figure one and another had cut at such and such a moment. Corporal Jennings was loudly lamenting the loss of his kit owing to the collapse of his shelter with fright: it would take him a month to dig it out and they would get shifted to another sector before he had rescued his belongings. Martin turned them to, and spent the rest of the day repairing as much as they could of the trench, scarcely conscious of the playful attention of a field gun that tried casually to spray them with shrapnel. His company commander, George Denny, who had seen a few months' campaigning with the

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2nd Battalion earlier in the year, came up and laughed.

"Did you notice any retaliation on our part?" he asked. "No? I 'phoned battalion headquarters and the gunners say they fired."

"I don't believe it," said Martin indignantly.

"Oh, yes. I was watching. They fired three shells—and two were duds."

"Is that all? It's a damned shame!"

"Can't help it, dear boy; our be-ewtiful army has been expressly desired not to infuriate the Boche, as we can't be spared any shells. All for Loos, y'know, and the world well lost."

They knocked off work at tea-time with as much as they could do repaired, and Martin walked down to the shelter, by courtesy the mess. The mail had come up. There was one letter for him in a hand he did not recognize. It was from Essex Poole's father, a very short, simple note. "I thought you would like to know at once . . . My poor boy was killed on the morning of the twenty-sixth, near a place called Corons de Pekin. They say he died at once—I am glad of that—while he was leading his platoon."

"What's the matter, Ord? Not bad news?" asked Denny.

"Only a pal of mine killed at Loos," said Martin grimly. "Only," he thought, with a twist of his lips. Quite the callous little soldier. Well, they would all soon be like that. He got up stiffly.

"We'll clear up what we couldn't do by daylight after stand down; and I'll have a wiring party

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out to make the gaps good, if number eleven can find me a covering party."

"All right, my lad," said Parr, in charge of number eleven, "I'll lend you Corporal Williams and six men."

Martin wandered back to his own bit of line. The men had finished their tea. Some were lying in their shelters, writing their so personal letters home, letters which at first, after a hasty, shy perusal, their officers quickly initialled, and in a month or so never troubled to read: it was doubtful whether any man in Martin's platoon could, had he desired, furnish the enemy with information of value. Others squatted in threes or fours on the trench bottom smoking and talking. Their grey shirts (for the sun still conferred his heat, though winter was coming down; and the men had stripped their tunics) showed sweat marks in patches; their trousers and puttees, dried, caked mud. For the moment, physically tired and filled with food, they were content. Sergeant Peppercorn, enormously at ease—he was a plumber in private life—was describing with a wealth of detail the complete sanitary system of a Mayfair magnate's house, which he had put in only eighteen months before. His audience listened to the *éloge* like children at a fairy story ("Ow many baths d'ye s'y, S'ar'nt, *Twelve!* Golly!") Martin passed into a bay, borrowed the rifle of the man on duty and looked about for something to shoot at. Anything to occupy his mind. Essex gone to the ravens. No one to sit on his bed now and talk nonsense. It was all a bloody swindle, this war. Essex was dead and

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the chattering bandarlog at Westminster talked about never sheathing the sword. From this point—the only one in his hundred yards—he could see the German trench, not directly opposite but some three hundred yards to his right, a line of white earth and a hazy tangle of rusty wire. A gentle smoke rose and hung in the air at two points there. Fritz was cooking his supper, blast him. He would like to get one for Essex. As he looked, he started to see a grey form clamber over the parados down there and begin to walk across the turf as unconcernedly as a tripper on Brighton pier. He put up the sights of the rifle a hundred yards, aimed and pulled the trigger. Missed—but the man skipped and ran. Martin opened and closed the rifle bolt, and covered his victim again. He fired just as the grey figure reached a second line of earth, the German support trench. It quivered, jerked forward, fell and disappeared into the gulf.

“Got him,” said the sentry enthusiastically, wiping his nose on his cuff. “Blast ’em all, say I. Knocking us about this morning.”

The little affair quickly ran down the line. “’Ear that? That young Ord—got a Fritz just now—yes, got ’im proper. Yus—officer shot a German—over there on the right. Mr. Ord’s shot a man.”

But Martin handed the rifle back gloomily. What did he want to shoot that unknown man for? A man probably as likeable and as lovable as any of his own platoon. A sacrifice to the *manes* of Essex? He almost heard a voice say, “You old ass.” It was no good.

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Night slowly fell. He laboured with his men until ten o'clock, supervising the digging, and the thickening of their protective tangles of wire until the young October moon went home to bed. He drank a deep draught of whisky at company headquarters, and rolled over on his wire bed worn out with hard bodily labour and exhausted emotion. His tour of night duty was from 3 to 5 a.m., and until then he slept.

When Parr woke him at three o'clock, he came slowly to the surface. At first he thought it was Essex Poole come to tell him of some newly discovered vintage. "Quiet as the grave, and twice as cold," said a voice. Martin sat up wildly, and Parr, seeing he was awake, rolled himself up in his British warm on the opposite bed. He gulped a tot of whisky and staggered sleepily into the trench. The night between the trench walls was pitch black, but a dash of stars spattered the sky. There was a chill in the air, and a little wind, like a lost dog, whined and nosed among the barbed wire and the rusty cans. As he stopped at the end of the company line, he saw in the darkness a blot in front of him, and flashing on his torch recognized Rain, a subaltern of the battalion on their flank of the next division.

"I saw you getting knocked about this morning," he said. "Any damage?"

Martin described his misfortunes. Together they climbed the fire-step of an empty bay and looked eastward, their elbows on the parapet. Martin could see the outline of Rain's head nodding sympathetically at his tale.

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"Beastly things, minnies. They scare me to death. They knocked hell out of a bit of forward trench we were digging a fortnight ago, and smashed all my platoon's tools. Then when we put it right, they smashed it again. So the C.O. decided to leave it smashed. Still, it's all in the game—like playing with a tiger."

"Game!" said Martin bitterly.

"What's the matter? Lost a pal, have you? Bad luck. A heap of good men have gone west with this tide—but that is life."

"Not the life we meant."

"No. I dare say not—but none of us is allowed to mean any life. We are just part of it."

"Are you a fatalist?"

"Not in the least. Only humble," Rain's quiet voice hesitated, then went on with greater strength. "Look here, Life as we understand it is a mess, a filthy seething manure heap in which the biggest bugs and grubs eat their way to the warmest nest, and down the million of other humble little midges in doing it! But I don't think it's quite so simple as that. Life, time and space are all parts of one vast machine which is so huge that we with our puny minds can hardly begin to grasp it. Perhaps in a hundred years, perhaps in a thousand, men will have approached close to the secret of our existence. Perhaps in ten years. Growth isn't a gradual process: growth comes in bounds: a rush, a pause for maturity, another rush. We're in one of these periods of growth now, an upward rush, whither no one knows. The old world, the world that ended in 1914, had become matured, had fattened and

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ripened, and was near to bursting with self-satisfaction. This war has given it the sudden impetus to growth it needed. Everyone has suddenly been made to think, and those who were thinking before have had to think twice as quick. When we come out,—and I intend to; I wouldn't miss it—we shall find a new world, different from the one we left, probably in many ways less easy, less fat, but a world whose thought has advanced fifty, a hundred years faster than if we had been left quiet. We may have—I know we shall have—approached nearer to the essential Godhead. Not the Godhead of the Christian, or of the Jews, or the Moslems or the Chinese—but the mysterious force that has placed life on this planet, and on no other. Probably we shan't be within an æon of understanding or interpreting it; it may only be a mathematical formula, but we shall have stepped a long pace nearer . . . There, I'm talking a lot of rot, but please don't think I'm making a long paraphrase of the flinching agnostic's, 'there must be something somewhere.' Sorry. I expect it is those stars up there that make me gabble like this."

"Visited by troops of marching stars," misquoted Martin. "You are lucky to have a belief. Mine have gone."

"Then, in God's name, believe in humanity. All effort is good, even if it is apparently personal and selfish, like an old woman painting her face. And thank God you are alive to-day to enjoy all your senses and all your emotions to the top of their power. Will you ever know sorrows like these again? And joys? Will you ever taste terror,

and know the very deepest abyss of misery ? Will you ever know again the rapture of escape, such as you meet here every six days ? Seize on them, garner them. They'll be the richest treasures you'll ever touch."

The outrageous enthusiasm of the man at his elbow infected Martin. The queer monologue, a voice in the darkness, had lifted the pain of Essex's death from his heart. He looked across the broken wire and saw the first hint of dawn quickening in the east, this promised world of which Rain was talking.

A rifle-butt bumped on the duckboard behind him. Rain's platoon sergeant stood to attention.

"'Ar-pas' four, sir. Shall I stand the company to ?"

"Do, Sergeant, and send a runner to warn Captain Robinson."

They could hear men's feet falling on the duckboards, the creak of equipment, the rattle of rifles, and the involuntary noises of wakened bodies. The German machine-gun tapped hungrily and slowly along the line.

"Well," said Rain, "I must be off to wake the children,

'Alas ! The watchman on his way
Calls and lets in—truth, terror and the day.'

"I say, forgive me talking all this nonsense, I don't believe half of it myself, but I wanted someone to talk to and you seemed too kind to interrupt. The chaps in our mess aren't very keen on metaphysical speculation."

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"I liked it," confessed Martin. "Anyhow it has given me something to think of."

"Nice of you to say so. Well, we shan't meet again; we're going out into rest to-morrow. Good night—or, rather, good morning."

CHAPTER VIII

THE winter passed in cold and mud. The Swallowtails went into trenches—tours were shortened to forty-eight hours with water knee-high and the lower stretches uninhabitable—came back into support, into reserve ; had a few casualties from shell-fire and many from sickness ; dug a number of posts never to be manned, watched them fall in and fill up ; grumbled, swore and learned their job. Leave opened, but Martin, junior subaltern and unmarried, had to wait his turn, until, at last the German attack on Verdun removed all thought of home. It was not until April that he finally escaped, and learned the raptures of that desultory journey that starts at the cross-roads of an obscure hamlet at midnight, and continues with fifteen miles of purgatorial jolting on a lorry to railhead, a twelve hours' tortuous progress through flat marshy Somme and Seine valleys, Havre, the old *Viper*, Southampton Water, bacon and eggs in a basket at Basingstoke, Waterloo and London, a heavenly city beneath its morning sun. The nostalgic eye seizes on beauties in the past unperceived, or lost by habit, and every girl is an authentic goddess, worthy of a poor soldier's homage.

Martin stopped at his club and ate a second breakfast. He scribbled a hasty note to Deborah,

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announcing his arrival, asking her to see him whenever she liked. Then he made his way to Paddington. The drive from the station to Salley Bushes was delicious. He cocked his nose and snuffed the scent of the early may. The red brick of the house as the car swept towards it, caught his eye at the familiar corner ; his heart missed a beat with joy. They were all on the steps to greet him, his aunt, Mr. Quarles, even his father leaning on a stout malacca. They made much of him, but somehow he could not find there the easy contentment of his early days ; he could not recapture the familiar acceptance of his father, his aunt and the house. He found himself at intervals standing away from them like a tourist looking at the front of a cathedral, examining this point and that, and as it were exclaiming to himself, " See, they've altered that since I was last here," whereas in fact nothing had been done ; only the feature, which he discovered, leaped straight to his unaccustomed eyes.

Robert Ord proclaimed that he was well, very well. He insisted on broaching a bottle of madeira on his son's arrival and, in spite of Fanny Dare's protests, of drinking a bumpering glass. Quarles was admitted to share in the orgy, and Martin was enthroned to tell them all his adventures. But soon he grew dispirited and began in his turn to ask questions, for he found, that try as they would, they could not comprehend of what he was talking, and their interest was simulated. Soon they were talking of their own affairs. Ducange was produced for his admiration : only half a volume was left to

be re-edited. Fanny Dare led Martin round the garden and displayed flower-beds put to potatoes, and a newly-installed hen run, of which she was intensely proud; "only they make rather a noise and Robert does swear so." She told him her news; Roderick in Scotland, gingering up munition plants; Deborah, she had tried to persuade to take a week's leave, but the girl had obstinately refused; Ambrose was as cloudy in schemes and work as ever, and Sybil more and more the committee woman; "she even patronizes *me*, my dear." Martin asked after Aurea. His aunt's face changed a little.

"I don't really know, Martin. She's a very independent young woman. I saw her the other day, beautifully dressed. I must say she is very handsome, almost a beauty—lunching with a flushed and dreadfully amorous colonel. She explained him as a friend of Mike's on leave, but I thought his friendship less for Mike than for Mike's wife."

"Mike's doing very well, isn't he?" asked Martin. (The brothers had ceased to write, but news filtered through in letters from home.)

"I believe so. I don't understand all your horrible grades, but I believe he is a brigade major, whatever that may be."

"How's the office?" Martin asked.

"Don't mention it to your father, if you can avoid it. It makes him lose his temper, which might provoke another stroke. He is not at all pleased with Ambrose, and says he has ruined his reputation, but Rod says that Ambrose is doing very well and making a lot of money."

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So Martin avoided the topic, until one day his father suddenly said violently, à propos of nothing at all—

“Have you seen the damned, beastly little books your brother is publishing?”

“I saw a bookstall flooded with a lot of pink covers and a great big O on the spines that I found were ours. I bought one,” Martin grinned, “for the sake of trade, and a poor florin’s worth I thought it.”

“Ambrose,” said Mr. Ord solemnly, “is steadily engaged in ruining the firm.”

“Oh, come, Father, I hear it’s doing very well. We aren’t losing money, in spite of the war.”

Robert Ord waved his hand impatiently.

“Money, money, what does money matter? It is our reputation I am concerned for. We have always been a firm of good repute: our name used to stand as high as Smith Elder’s and Macmillan’s; but to-day, we are dealing in filth.”

“I always thought Ambrose was very chaste, given to Sunday school moralizings. I’m surprised at Sybil allowing him to be licentious.”

“Don’t be a fool, boy,” growled his father. “You know what I mean. It is this cheap, shoddy, back-area stuff, only fit for munition gels and typing gels and what-nots. I have to lie here and see the traditions of a hundred years smashed by my own son, so that my bitch of a daughter-in-law can buy herself a title. If I had the use of my legs, I’d stop it here and now, but I’m an old, done for man, and . . . Martin, boy, promise me this. The firm has been left in my will to the three of you; none has a

controlling interest. I look to you, and I look to Michael to help you, to pull it back on to the right lines, when you come back. Understand, it is your duty. Promise me."

Martin looked very soberly at his father. A number of derisory ideas came tumbling into his head. Robert Ord had forgotten the war; had forgotten that his son might easily not return, that Mike might not, and anyhow had his own career, that life, as Rain had prophesied, was changing so fast that it ran swifter than a tide beneath their contemplation; that, after this war, seemingly infinite, new laws, new codes would take the place of the old ones, that reputations would be measured by other standards than those his father chose. Nevertheless, he nodded gravely and took the wasted hand.

"I promise to do what I can," he said.

Robert Ord sighed gratefully. "I know I can trust you, Martin," he said. "You are very like your mother, my dear boy." He turned his head away and closed his eyes.

Three days before the end of his leave, Martin felt he could stand his home no longer. He made his farewells and came up to London. His first action after he had secured a room at his club was to ring up Deborah's office. A long pause and then he was told that she was away on leave. He asked how long she had been gone and was told a week, and that she would not be back until after his leave had expired; her address was in Dover.

The information somehow did not surprise him. His week at home had made him feel so much at a

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distance from his relatives that it was as if he were still in France and they had merely been brought close to him by a powerful field-glass. Deborah had not replied to his letter. She had run away from him, he supposed, deliberately: and this only served to make him feel more foreign to his home; as if, instead of in France, his feet were in fact planted in Russia. He turned away with a sigh.

On one of his three remaining nights he dined with Ambrose and Sybil. The latter told him all about the war with a plethora of misinformation only obtainable from good women who ran with equal energy amusements for the wounded and crèches for munition workers' children: at the end, it seemed hardly worth his return to his battalion, the war would be over so soon. Ambrose was thinner and looked worn. His air of preoccupation was more marked and he was very taciturn. He told Martin after dinner that he was tired; he had too much work and no one whom he could trust. Business was good and would be better. The cheap lines of fiction, which had so distressed Mr. Ord, were selling over and over again. The printing works had paid their way handsomely, and he had now added a bindery to the organization. Also, quietly, without telling his father, he had got his foot into the journalistic world: a couple of good religious magazines had tumbled into his hand, and several trade papers. They would come out of the war rich, Ambrose was sure, with a solid backing, strong reserves and a minted good will.

"All the same, Nipper, I want you back as soon as possible. The strain is getting too much for me.

Micklejohn says I ought to rest, but I can't. Not yet."

He stretched out a hand and drew from behind the water-jug at his elbow a bottle of evil-looking pills.

"This is what I keep going on," he grimaced.

On his second night, Martin caught Dan Palliser, who took him to his rooms after a sumptuous dinner and talked quietly of life as he understood it. The sober, somewhat pathetic conversation of the middle-aged dandy rang to Martin like a faded *étude* of Chopin, a little out of fashion, but carrying its own authentic scent. Palliser was the only one of those he had seen, who was trying gamely to adjust his mind to the rapid transformation of the world that was smokily evolving before their eyes. He was doing his best to extend a welcoming hand to the hordes of women who were gradually usurping the place of men as the cogs of business, to atrocities such as margarine and cocktails, to the ever-increasing throng of automobiles, to short, clipped sentences, a martial telegraphese, as a means of communication, in the place of spacious dialogue, to the new kind of people who were invading the sacred precincts of his clubs in the specious disguise of the King's uniform; but the hand trembled a little, and the welcome was a trifle uncertain in its warmth.

Martin found his last day heavy on his hands. Hankering for companionship, he thankfully accepted a temporary affiliation with one Sanders, a gunner from his own division, whom he had seen twice or thrice in an O.P. in his company's lines.

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When they met, Martin realized at once that his acquaintance was already tinged two or three shades deep in liquor; and was, moreover, distressed to find him in close conversation with two palpable ladies, who tried to disguise a natural vacuity, an utter incapacity for their trade of charmers, and the bowels of the harpy, beneath a flow of provisional and unamusing catchwords.

"Hullo, young Ord," shouted his comrade-in-arms. "Come on. This is Elsie and this is Cynthia. Have a drink? Toss you who pays. Come on, girls, drink up, an' meet my friend Ord of a bloody regiment whose name I can't remember, but he's all right."

Both ladies shrilled with amusement, and Martin descended into the depths of misery—a descent made only swifter by the noxious beverage which passed for a Martini. He cursed himself for prig and, pulling himself together, ordered another round. The girls said he was a sport and demanded his Christian name, which made them again scream with laughter, after which they piled into a taxi and were carried to a restaurant. As they stood in the hall debating whether they should patronize the grill room or the brasserie, Martin suddenly caught sight of Aurea descending the staircase. He turned his back and tried to hide his face, but she had seen him, and called him by name. Behind her stood a tall, brick-red colonel, with staff badges and a row of decorations. Aurea was perfectly dressed and radiantly beautiful; the colonel was excited.

"Why haven't you been to see me, Martin?"

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asked Aurea. "Deborah told me you were on leave. Other attractions?" She shot an arch glance at the group past Martin's head.

Martin flushed and murmured vaguely that he had only just come to London, and was going back to-morrow morning.

"A last night's amusement? My dear Martin, I thought better of you. Mind your friends don't make you miss your train. Brookie," she went on, talking to her escort, "this is Mike's brother, my brother-in-law. This is Colonel Brooke of Mike's division, Martin."

Both the colonel and Martin were embarrassed, Martin at his company, the colonel because he could not disguise the fact that he was palpitating with the excitement of Aurea's presence, and because he despised, as a matter of course, all New Army subalterns, especially those who escorted Elsie and Cynthia. They shook hands frigidly and the colonel made noises to be interpreted as his recognition of Martin's existence.

"Well, I'll leave you to your friends, Martin, I shall be seeing Deborah on Monday, I'll tell her I've seen you," and with a wave of her hand, she was gone.

"Where can that boy have picked up those awful women?" she said in the cab. "It is dreadful to think what the war has brought to the surface and Martin used to be so reserved." In her mind she was perfectly aware that Martin was a victim, but she felt that a little doleful sympathy with his relations would give her something of her own back. "I hate relations," she thought.

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As for Martin, the meeting with his sister-in-law roused every angry instinct within him. He was furious with Aurea, who would infallibly report the encounter to Deborah with details, furious with Colonel Brooke, whom he thought of as a lecherous, pompous humbug; and determined to take command of the evening's amusement. He drove his chattering party before him into the restaurant, ordered the food and the wine through the mouth-piece of Cynthia, who, by order of the military authorities that officers should not spend more than a limited amount on a meal, became the hostess of the party, and flung himself desperately into the task of being merry. As a result he drank too much, told several improper stories, greeted with sufficient mock-modesty by the women, and did his best to avoid a closer proximity with Cynthia, whose synthetic scent, lavishly distributed, made him feel a little sick.

"Who's your lady friend?" Elsie inquired in the phrase of the day.

"My bitch of a sister-in-law," replied Martin.

"Sh-sh," said Elsie reprovingly. "That wasn't your brother with her?"

"Oh, no . . . just a friend of his."

"Friend of his! Of hers, you mean. My, but she's pretty. Cynthia, did you hear, that was Martin's sister-in-law."

Cynthia, who had been devoting herself to the now quite drunk Sanders, turned her dark face towards Martin—"Are you married?" she asked.

"No. She's the wife of my brother in France."

"And that's her fancy soldier, eh?"

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Martin shuddered with repulsion.

"He's a friend of my brother on leave," he explained.

"Oh, tell that . . ." interrupted Elsie. "Shut up, Cynth-ya . . . well, why shouldn't she? War's war, isn't it, and a little of what you fancy does you good . . . doesn't it, boy?" She turned for confirmation to Sanders, who roared his approval. "It's a good old war," he shouted and began to relate an adventure that he had undertaken in Amiens. Both girls applauded the dull dénouement; and Cynthia pinched Martin's knee under the table. By the time dinner was over, she was leaning heavily against him and trying to brush his cheeks with her hair. The odour of her body had overcome her vile scent. He writhed with discomfort and disgust. Fully aware for what purpose he was required, he suggested a music hall in the hope of getting separated, but the idea was negatived.

"You're coming along with us, boy," said Cynthia firmly. "Just to see the inside of our little flat. Music halls are lousy." She took his pocket-book to pay the bill, and he was able to appreciate the deft habit which allowed her to return it to him half empty. He found himself pushed into a taxi, Sanders sprawling on the floor in Elsie's arms. He thanked God when the cab drew up in a mean street. Making play to find money for the cab, he let the others invade the doorstep; and then shamelessly telling the man to drive like hell, flung himself into the taxi and was borne away, to an accompaniment of shrill, angry screams.

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He was quite aware that he had abandoned Sanders, but he didn't care. He leaned out of the window to direct the driver to his club, and stayed there, breathing in air to cleanse him of the fetid atmosphere that still hung about the interior. He did not feel purged until he was on the boat next day with the Channel breezes driving through him.

The Somme battle opened a month or so after his return. The Swallowtails' division was not in the first attacks: but three days later they were relieved by a handful of officers and men, the remnant of a battalion which had been there. In another fortnight, already diminished by shell-fire, they were ordered to attack some fortified ruins which had once been a village, and now in revenge for all it had suffered at the hands of the Allies, was harbouring, in its cellars, nests of German machine gunners. It is sufficient to say that the attack failed. The orders were cancelled before zero hour, but the postponement reached the Swallowtails too late. When they clambered into the open, they were at once assailed by a storm of shells and machine-gun bullets. Overwhelmed, they staggered forward a hundred yards or so. A sunk road offered them a temporary shelter, but a battery of 5.9's discovered them and took them in enfilade. The colonel had been killed in the first few minutes; the second in command lay badly wounded and unconscious in a scraping which his servant was trying frantically to deepen into some kind of shelter. No troops appeared on either flank; they were isolated. Denny and the other three company

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commanders gathered hastily in a shell-hole to discuss their future action. A shriek, an explosion, a cloud of black choking smoke, and the conference was over; a leg, an arm, a twisted water-bottle and some indescribable fragments was all that remained. The Swallowtails clung on desperately during the afternoon. As dark fell, a message reached them telling them to fall back. Bearing their wounded, they recrossed the strip of land they had passed that morning, and crawled into the original line. Here they lay for another twenty-four hours, harassed by heavy shells, by bursts of black shrapnel, by stuttering machine-guns, until at night a fresh battalion took their place.

Back in rest near Corbie, Martin tried to reconstruct that attack, but found only a series of blurred pictures. The explosion of a shell a few feet away had dazed him just before they had started. He had climbed the parapet and had passed the first devastating zone in a state of semi-stupor. The deaths of Denny and Parr, the wounding of the two other officers of his company had been merely incidents. He had gone about quietly, directing men, making them dig, had bound up wounded in rough and ready fashion, and then had sat partly stunned in a cleft in the bank side until the order came to retire. Now he had command of what had been his company, fifty men out of two hundred odd. New drafts came to them, and gradually the Swallowtails were built into a battalion again, but it was a restoration, not a genuine piece. Never would they feel again the first easy cohesion of a creation that has grown all in one. Martin mourned Denny and

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Parr, companions of two years, with the grief which results from the destruction of something stable and permanent in our lives. In his own every day life, he would never have missed them. In two years of peace, they would have sunk back into the row of masks one recognizes but never takes down; but in the setting of the company, they had been prized figures in the pattern. And now the pattern was torn into almost unrecognizable shreds. He took over the company mare, Arabella, as part of his inheritance, spent the afternoons riding the Somme banks, and while the animal grazed, sat watching the creases on the sunken water, to heal his mind.

The division was sent north and spent two months in recovering its shattered constitution in what was from now onward to be known as "peace time trenches." In October they were taken out and once more sent southward. Martin now had his company, and his rank of captain was confirmed. He enjoyed that week of marching through frosty mornings and burning noondays. They went by little used roads far back from the line, through untouched villages, beneath unsmirched trees, down lanes ramparted with golden hedges, until at last they came to one of those caravanserais, which were erected at many points along the British line, where the acme of misery was achieved, because it was considered that troops might spend one night there without mutiny, never two. As a result most battalions that came to them usually stayed a week or a fortnight and thought at the end of two days that they had been there for ever, and would

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remain there for eternity. The Swallowtails were planted in a five-acre orchard which had recently been a horse standing. No grass grew beneath the trees ; the ground was churned with the feet and hoofs of many thousands of men and animals ; the men dwelt in leaking tents ; the officers in four huts which, owing to shortage of canvas, had been roughly covered with sackings ; coal was deficient ; only green wood obtainable to burn ; and it rained. Day after day it rained remorselessly, the kind of rain that has become a vice with itself ; it was neither hard nor soft ; it never altered its tempo, but just rained on, obdurate against the curses of soldiers and the prayers of generals.

While they kicked their heels, Martin received a laconic note from Mike inviting him to dine. His brother was billeted in a neighbouring village and that evening he rode over, splashing through the mud and the vast puddles, which glimmered on the pavé with an opalescent oily scum. Michael was in the brigade office studying with grim intentness a sheaf of pink telegraph forms by the light of candles stuck into howitzer cordite cases. They shook hands, and smiled at one another.

"Just a minute, kid," said Michael. He took up a dictation to the waiting clerk . . . " ' The head of the column will pass cross-roads X.30.b.5.2 at 10.00hrs. . . . Brigade report centre . . . Lorries . . . s.o. at railhead . . . ' Usual fifteen copies, Soames. Bring me the stencil in the mess."

Martin sat back and examined his brother. Beneath the gay cleanliness of the red tabs and blue brassard, the M.C. over his heart, Michael was

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looking ill—no, worn, rather. His skin was tired ; lines had come on the cheeks, which had paled ; the eyes were weary and shot with blood ; the expression hard but haggard.

“ We’re only here for one night,” he said, as they walked to the ante-room. “ They pulled us out from opposite the Schwaben a week ago and we’re going to spend the winter at Hill 60.” He led him into the ante-room and introduced him to the interpreter and the staff captain, who exchanged commonplaces and withdrew to change for dinner.

Michael watched his brother, as he absorbed a whisky and soda, and prattled contentedly of his men, and of his daily troubles and amusements. Martin seemed so calm, and so happy, so unperturbed in a life of distresses, that he could scarcely believe him other than he was now. Yet Michael had received from Aurea a letter full of grievances, a tale of his brother flushed with wine, in grimy company—and Aurea had penned her description of the scene with venomous irony. Brooke, too, had referred to the meeting with half-veiled pompous disdain. Michael felt sore and irritated. He had been working at pressure for a fortnight on end, had had little sleep between the acts of the farcical tragedy of the Somme, had quarrelled fiercely with his divisional superiors over the failure of the unhappy infantry to get forward, had missed death—though that was a commonplace—by fractions of time and space on several occasions. His nerves were frayed and his skin felt like brittle papyrus. Martin’s almost bucolic cheerfulness tore

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away the last shreds of his self-restraint, and he burst out with :

“ I’ve been hearing from Aurea about your exploits on leave.”

“ What exploits do you mean ? ” said Martin truculently.

“ Making a display of yourself with a couple of drunken tarts.”

“ Oh, *that* . . . that was an accident.” Martin related the story, but Mike remained relentless.

“ You oughtn’t to be seen with that type of creature. It’s a nice kind of thing for me to have old Brooke talking to the general about the society my brother keeps. It’ll do me a lot of good, won’t it ? Just when I expect to get a step up to Corps ! ”

Martin lost his temper. “ Damn it, Mike, if that is all you’re after, why don’t you inculcate a little tact into your wife.”

They wrangled unhappily for some time, and, at last, puzzled and sore, dropped the subject. The brigade commander came into the room, and Mike sulkily introduced his brother. Over dinner, Martin cooled down. General Carrick was a character and had a hobby, old soldier airs and marching songs. He examined Martin thoroughly on the songs that his company sang, and was delighted over one local improvisation, which he declared had the proper historic ring. After dinner, he dragged Martin to a battered cottage piano and insisted on playing to him and singing old songs whose echoes may still be caught across the centuries, songs of La Hire’s men-at-arms, of Wallenstein’s *reiters*, of Marlborough’s troopers, of MacMahon’s *chasseurs alpins*.

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Mike had gone off to the office. When he returned, he found his general and Martin, flushed and singing:

*“Dixième bataillon
Commandant Macmahon
N’a pas peur du canon
Non, non, non, non.”*

While the interpreter and the staff captain joined nobly in the chorus. When he left, Martin was cordially invited to come again ; and Michael, mollified by his commander’s enthusiasm, shook Martin warmly by the arm, and gruffly apologized for his ill-temper. Martin, his head ringing with “*Non, non, non, non,*” rode off happily through the dripping darkness, but at the back of his mind lay an uneasiness of what mischief the tongue of Aurea was doing him.

At last, in early November, a party of officers rode ten miles to a rendezvous on a desolate hillside, their starting point as following assault brigade in an attack on an unknown position at an unknown time on an unknown date. A week later they found themselves shivering here on a dark, misty morning, wet through and miserable. All round them guns clashed and clanged : the haze reddened momentarily as a six-inch howitzer a hundred yards below them fired across their heads. Behind these immediate sounds the distant barrages persisted with the uncertain mutter of a gale in the chimney-pots. Gradually the wan day crept timorously in, hesitated, and slowly devoured the pallid mist. Rumour came floating back, tossed from mouth to mouth, shapeless. “Blue line taken : green line captured . . . held up on the brown . . .

prisoners." At last the colonel returned from his attendance on the brigadier in the valley. Martin and the other company commanders squatted round him, their helmets on the backs of their heads, maps and note-books open. The usual optimistic information was given, so much captured, troops still going forward, with the inevitable misty tailing off. "The exact position of the leading troops is uncertain." Wherever it was, they were to go forward to a point where guides would meet them: they would be led forward and might expect to go through on the following morning . . . "towards the new world," muttered Martin to his neighbour.

Night fell and the Swallowtails trudged dourly into the dark. They passed through a village stinking with gas, shells falling sporadically among the outlying barns, halted, moved on again, halted, not knowing whether to sit down or whether they would suddenly be hurried on; they moved and descended a precipitous track, came to the ghost of a hamlet, wreathed in the mists of the river they could hear flowing coldly below the desultory gunfire. Shadowy figures greeted them and led them forward. A faint moonlight revealed what had been a road between an overhanging bluff and sparred trees in the marshy river bed, but the road was no more; chasms yawned, and the displaced earth rose in painful hummocks. They stumbled forward in single file, slowly, slowly: halts became more and more frequent, to make way for stretchers with wounded, returning carrying parties, trains of mules. Bodies of English and German dead, and twisted carcasses of animals lined the route: the

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shelling in front grew sharper and more venomous. At last they came to an open space, a small valley contained by chalky cliffs: the farther bank seemed girdled with fire, but by parties of five and six they dribbled across it to comparative safety. On the cliff side they roosted like so many gulls nesting beyond the reach of the sea of steel and flame which tossed round their feet. Exhausted, miserable, hot with their exertion, they slept in tumbled heaps until the night cold froze the sweat on them, and they woke, stiff and shivering.

An hour before dawn, they lined the top of the bank. Before them a hill curved into the blackness, where they were told lay a trench, some broken walls, a cemetery, and a few tree stumps that had once been a village. Yes, over there where that flare came from. The shelling had grown less, but now as the blackness became grey, battery after battery woke in turn and joined in a harsh *aubade*. Martin lay gazing at his watch in the centre of his company. The night cold, the exhaustion, the racking din formed in his head like a lump of ill-digested pudding, numbing his brain. The hands of his watch moved on. He rose stiffly and felt others rising to his right and left. Then there was a shoot of flame in which he seemed to be whirling upwards and upwards: a shadow rushed forward, caught and smothered him.

CHAPTER IX

SOME four months later Martin was seated by the fire in his father's library. His wound was healed ; but his leg obstinately refused to gather the strength necessary to carry even his light weight. Opposite him sat Robert Ord, his head pillowed, his legs beneath a rug. Martin had watched him while he had sat correcting the last sheets of the final volume of Ducange. He had observed a more than usually meticulous accuracy being demanded of this volume, a continual sending to and fro of Quarles to quarry verification from the shelves, the frequent argument of an already well disputed point, as if the editor was holding himself back from writing, for the last time, " Press, R.O." upon the final proofs ; and he had apprehended that his father felt that, with the passing of his great work, would come the final call, that with the writing of the cantrap " press," all his blood would drain swiftly from him, and his body crumble into dust. At last he had nerved himself to the pious execution ; the final signature had been extracted, and now, each evening in the fading twilight of March, he lay, his face leaned aside to watch the poplar leaves turning in the breeze, transmuted, as they fluttered, from black to silver, and again to gold by the sun's alchemy.

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It was the hour when his mind returned to the life of which he had been so avid. Sometimes he would sit in silence, tracing back the long road of his life: for memory is a lonely path, and none can bear the traveller company upon that way. At other times, when he was stronger, he would slip from a drawer some relic of the past, a letter, a ring, a ribbon, a coin, a token which, when rubbed, would call up a legend bound up with his own or his family's history, making, from the worn shape, a picture for his son's eyes, but for his own a breathing reality.

"There has been little room for sentiment in my life, which has been too bustling for sentiment," he said one afternoon: "therefore I keep these little objects as *ex votos* against too much realism. When I finger this gold piece of Louis XVI and this torn assignat, I like to think of my grandfather—your great grandfather—selling Beaumarchais to free-thinking Liberals with their hair over their ears and to pretty countesses in the Rue des Trois Echelles. This miniature by Cosway was given to his father by lovely, feckless Elizabeth Craven, in payment of the printer's bill for one of her egregious plays: it is worth that printer's bill twenty times over, but the face is worth it a hundred times. Here is a scrap of pattern for a waistcoat that Brummell left one day with an order to have a poem of Byron's bound in similar fashion. Here is a seal Charles Dickens gave me in recognition of a small service I once was able to do him. These toys are the frail chain of the traditions of our house. *Tempora mutantur*—but the tradition remains;

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when it goes, the house will fall. You cannot bend a full grown yew to any other shape than that in which it grew without killing it. We have made mistakes often ; but humanism and light have always been our aim."

One night when the talk had fallen on the war, and the entry of the United States on the side of the Allies was mentioned, Robert Ord snorted :—

"These barbarians ! No—worse—these utilitarians. It would be better for Europe to perish than to admit them. They are to Europe what Rome was to Greece, an ugly destroying blot. With their money, their oil, their corn, their aids to efficiency—what have they done ? Only tried to go one better than anyone else, and produced a caricature of civilization. Better for us to die or to lapse into barbarism than to have our faces lifted and ape the manners of this young people."

To-night Martin watched the fine profile as it lay there motionless, even the eyelids unwinking, a cameo cut out of the pillow with just the cheeks, the lips and the nostrils tinted to give it life. They had sat so face to face, in the dimming light for the past thirty days or was it years—or lifetime, so familiar had they become in their talk and their silences. The gulf of years that separated them had filled in. But to-night he saw his father as from a great distance, for the spirit of Robert Ord had slipped away and was summoning the past years to spread their treasures for his comfort. At the lonely assize of remembrance were arraigned all the details of his life, gentle or cruel ; a day in his childhood when, from his nursery window in Spring

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Gardens, he had thrust his scarlet curls to watch the Life Guards parading before they sailed for Sebastopol, one of his uncles teaching him some nonsensical jingle—how did it go—“Keemo, Kimo, ware-o-ware, me-i, meo, meinktum Salley, sometime periwinkle lingtum nipcat, sing-song, pollywood de-try-me-O;” his tossing in a blanket, the first night in college; his great fight down cloisters at Westminster with some boy—tut, he had forgotten his name, a lean ugly youth, with protruding teeth that damaged his knuckles as much as their owner’s lips—he could still see the whitened line of the scars if he looked closely; a night in his first year at Oxford when, amid much laughter, he had made a wild speech in defence of Mazzini, Frederick Denison Maurice and *Poems and Ballads*—gad, how he had been chipped about that; a glorious summer afterwards when he had taken his religious scruples to the great Liddell, and got snubbed for his pains, a snubbing he hardly noticed for the disturbing scent of may floating in through the wide set windows (young men did not have religious scruples to-day, he noticed; all his sons lived in a negation of faith).

He dwelt on his early years in London, his dark rooms in Clifford Street and his membership of the New Club, as it had been called in its early days, when one dined honourably and well for a florin and quarrelled joyously or bitterly in the smoking-room with fellows who had not yet made the names that to-day were honoured; his early struggles to caulk his firm’s leaky boat, the nights when he would sit for hours balancing

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figures and chances to emerge into the foggy, reeking Strand, sometimes early enough to see young swells driving the Gaiety beauties off to supper at the Bristol in their private hansoms ; sometimes so late that the streets were empty, save for a few luckless prostitutes, their skirts draggled with the foul pavements, their boots turned over at heel ; hot days when the streets stank of horse droppings that the agile boys with brush and pan could never clear.

He tried to avoid memories of his first wife, but they beseeched him for recall, and, though he shrank from them, swept over his protests. The bitter sweetness of those early days came to him with the intoxicating rankness of elderflower ; he knew now—he had known at the time, though his wilfulness would not allow the admission,—that nothing yoked them except a harmony of flesh, and when that had staled, nothing could redower them. He tried to believe that he had done his duty by her : he pleaded the river parties at Twickenham, dinners at the Star and Garter, the Toxophilite Club meetings, the Doucet bonnets, theatres, balls, the brilliant men with whom he had surrounded her : but his pleas failed. In the toleration of age, he confessed that he had made no allowances for her ; having committed the first crime, how could he do otherwise (Martin watching from the other side of the hearth saw the jaws stiffen and clench, the eyebrows jerk). Well, she had gone ; and her lover, Bruce, was now a sour old man afflicted with arthritis and kidney trouble.

Turn these memories away for kinder, honester

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years that came trooping in with the recollection of Harry Palliser, his darling, the exquisite moments of first love, the surrender of his personality in hers, the re-quickening of his powers beneath her deft sympathy, the growth and widening of his love from the first sharp ecstasy to a strong plant. He had never learned to make a habit of her; she had a protean gift for never exhibiting to him the same side: and so their love had provided a freshness untainted by familiarity. He had thought often in terror of what would befall if she should die. He remembered being dispatched from the house when Michael, and again when Martin was born, to walk feverishly round and round the Serpentine with Dan Palliser, whose idea of distracting him was to debate the question of whether mussels were more agreeable *marinières* or as a concomitant to a white wine sauce. Last of all, he recalled with still vivid horror the memory of the day he had been brought back to the house, in a furiously driven cab, to find nothing but her crushed and shattered body, laid like a sprig of browning lilac on the bed. He clenched his fist as he remembered the agony with double detail and groaned aloud, so loudly that the memories bundled themselves away in a fright, and he looked up into a face, he dare swear his wife's. It was Martin's, who alarmed at the emotional crisis his father was going through, had hobbled across the hearth. Robert Ord took his hand. "It was nothing, my dear boy, I was only dreaming," and Martin could not understand why his father looked at him with such eyes of hope.

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A moment later he turned his face to the sun, and sighed. It was several minutes before Martin realized that he was dead.

The body of Robert Ord, according to his instructions, was buried beside that of his second wife. The will left his business in such fashion that while Ambrose became the largest shareholder, both the other brothers had interests that together could outvote the eldest. Ambrose with his forty-nine per cent. would require the support of either Michael or Martin, who split the remainder in the proportion of two to one, to carry out any radical alteration. But with their military occupation, neither of the younger brothers troubled to exert their authority and the reins therefore remained in Ambrose's hands. Salley Bushes was left to Roderick Dare for life, with remainder to his wife and daughter. Many small legacies were directed to old servants and members of the firm, while Horatio Quarles was assured an income for life. On his last afternoon at the house, Mr. Quarles walked up and down the terrace with Martin, lending him his arm.

"I shall not stay in England, Martin. There is nothing left here for me. I have a promise made to me long ago by the abbot of a Trappist monastery near Soller, to admit me whenever I apply. Poor man, I believe he thought it would cure my complaint" (Mr. Quarles grimaced over his past weaknesses). "But now I have a complaint for which silence only can find a cure, or perhaps, I should say, an anodyne. I loved your father, Martin, and

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with his death—I do not speak rashly—the light has gone out. Only a few were privileged to know anything of him, his honesty, his kindness, his faith. He hid his qualities beneath that stern, quick-tempered brusquerie. The happiest months of my ridiculous life have been these last spent under his roof. It is my pride that my name stands beneath his and old Ducange's on the title page of the last volume. Now my work is finished and I shall go to meditate for my remaining years in that white house between Pollensa and Soller, and to try to find contentment in watching the orange trees blossom, fruit and ripen."

On the next day he took his departure. The shabby, black figure rose in his seat as his car turned the last corner and waved back a farewell. Martin never heard of him again.

So April passed out. From France had come the news of the Arras battle, fought for three weeks that opened in snow and mist and ended in summer heat. Mike wrote that the British could have gone through to Douai but for their orders, that they sat for four hours with nothing in front of them but the trench watchman and his dog, as snug as Clives in Ludlow, until the Boche came back again to resume the battle. He added as a postscript that he was appointed G.S.O.2 of a Corps in the north, and that spelt a complete rest.

At last Martin's leg was growing stronger; he was able to jettison his stick. Ordered before a medical board, he came to London some days early. With the thought that perhaps he had failed in tact towards Aurea, he called one afternoon at her

flat in Chelsea. He felt that his presence irked her, but she made him welcome, an insincerity that became more acute when the bell rang and a young man of elaborate habit and manner was shown in. He bent and kissed Aurea's hand with a dexterous grace, and was charmingly paternal to Martin.

Stephen Ferrars was a product of one of the many mushroom ministries that sprang up all over the open spaces of London under the exuberant warrior touch of Mr. Lloyd George. A weakness of chest had mercifully preserved him from the earlier enthusiasm of 1914, and turned his charming personality to nicer fields than those of battle: he had thankfully accepted a chair and sufficient salary in the Ministry of Control, whose business was omniscience. Omniscience is an enhancing trait in times of war, when the newspapers are withheld from the delicious indiscretion that savours existence: and Stephen Ferrars was undergoing the delightful experience of being accepted as Sir Oracle, with his hints and implications—"which, of course, must go no farther than these walls, dear lady." He had made Aurea's acquaintance at a dinner some months earlier, had flirted with her mildly and sedately, had pressed his enthusiasm in her company, and now was a discreet frequenter of her society. As they drank their tea, he gave them of his store, generously including Martin in his confidence, although addressing himself to Aurea, told them of the French mutinies, of the Russian lapses, of the repentant Americans, discussed the latest imbroglios with regard to unity of command mixed

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by the Prime Minister, all with so deft a flattery of Aurea ("as you will very well understand," "as you, with your knowledge of the world, would reprobate,") at once subtle and inoffensive, that Martin remained mute with admiration. To flatter Aurea's brains was a master-stroke, he reflected, as he watched her smiling with pleasure. He saw that Ferrars intended to outstay him (indeed, Ferrars was giving dinner to Aurea at a charming and esoteric restaurant) so he stumped to his feet and said good-bye. "What an ass Aurea is," he thought, as he hailed a cab.

He had not seen Deborah now since he had first gone to France. Her deliberate failure to see him on leave had rebuffed him so severely that he would not write without a sign from her, while she, he felt, had been made to put the worst construction on Aurea's tale. He heard of her through Fanny Dare, but since his last leave, neither of them had written. The hospital to which he had been sent, had been selected with peculiar tact: it could only be reached on week-days, and that by starting early in the morning. So no communication had taken place. At last, when he was due for his medical board, he had taken his courage in both hands, rung up her office, and asked her to meet him.

The warmth of her greeting surprised him. She chid him gaily for never having approached her and appointed an immediate meeting. At the door of the shabby little restaurant, where she was wont to make her evening meal, there might have been a moment of embarrassment, but by the time he had disposed of his weaker leg beneath the darned

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table-cloth, he found her regarding him with the same expression she had worn on their last night together. Had she been looking at him with just that gaze ever since?

At first they talked generalities, Robert Ord's death, her mother, Michael, Aurea.

"Have you seen her recently?" he asked. "No? Perhaps you don't know a young man called Ferrars?"

"Why? Has anyone said anything to you?"

"I met him there yesterday. He seemed as happy as a young cuckoo in a thrush's nest."

"I don't know anything very much. I used to see Aurea a great deal last winter, until she met this creature, and, as he was always with her, I slid out. I told her she was making a fool of herself and Stephen Ferrars. In fact, she inferred that she was his spiritual directress, and, as such, necessary to the salvation of the Allies. You know what she can be like."

He nodded, and asked, "Mike?"

"I think Mike met him once, but he laughed such a lot that Aurea sulked; and that made things worse."

Martin told her of his medical board and surmised that he was fit enough for general service.

"I can't bear you to go out again," she said. "Can't you get some job at home, at the depot?"

Martin shook his head derisively. "Lord, no. I couldn't bear it. The battalion's become home to me; unpleasant when the roof leaks or falls in, but still home."

"I hope Brian will feel like that, when he goes."

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"They're not sending him, are they?" He had nearly said "at last."

"Not quite yet, but he'll go in the autumn."

("I hope the brute gets it in the neck," thought Martin).

As their coffee was brought to them, Martin, not looking at Deborah, asked:

"Why haven't you written to me for all these months, Deb?"

She tried to answer gaily.

"You didn't write to me. Was I to do it then? Besides, I've been very busy."

"No more than you were before I came back. You used to write then."

"Oh well . . ." She shrugged her shoulders, and coloured.

"Tell me," Martin went on inexorably, "was it anything Aurea said?"

Deborah did not reply but the deepened colour signalled assent. Martin groaned.

"Oh, *damn* Aurea!" he said fervently. "She seems to have done her best to say ugly things about me to everybody. Listen, Deb. This is the clear and painful truth." He told his miserable tale over, as it seemed to him for the hundredth time, and ended, "That's all, and a pretty ass I felt."

Deborah considered for a minute.

"But weren't they even attractive, Martin?"

"Attractive! If you had smelt 'em!"

"Don't be coarse Martin. I believe you. I ought to have known."

"And in any case," continued Martin, "haven't you adopted almost a proprietary interest?"

Deborah smiled at him under her eyelashes.

"Of course I have. You belong to me."

"Once you told me to fall in love with you."

She made no reply, but sat rubbing her finger to and fro along the edge of the table-cloth, watching it as if to decide where this impertinent member would stop.

"Well . . . it was a joke, wasn't it?" he pleaded; "but you weren't to fall in love with me." Anxiously he watched for a clue. Almost he wanted her to laugh at him and to free him from an enchantment he had wilfully courted. Or did he not really want her by a denial to submerge him in it? The intensity of the minute spun forward and backward into infinity.

"I've kept my side of the bargain," he went on lamely.

She looked at him now, and, with an air of guilt defiantly shouldered, replied steadily:

"And I've not kept mine. Oh, I meant to, I meant to, but ever since we said good-bye nearly two years ago—even before then, perhaps—I was sure. I've never wanted anyone else but you, my dear."

"I've never wanted anyone but you. . . . If I'd only woken up earlier . . . What a fool I was . . . What are we going to do about it?"

She knitted her brows. "Nothing," she said decidedly. "You know and I know. That is enough."

CHAPTER X

IT is a tiny chamber, underground, say eight feet long and five wide, furnished with two bunked mattresses of rabbit wire, a narrow ledge table, a bench and a packing-case. The walls wear an affectation of comfort from the sacking nailed to it, but the canvas is soiled, and rents discover the solid pit props behind. On the table lies a panoply ; a thumbed, worn map, stained with mud and food, a whisky bottle and one enamelled mug, a packet of Gold Flake, a note-book, and a Mills bomb, dimly lit by a candle stuck in a bottle neck, down which the grease of a hundred older candles has run and congealed. The walls are decorated with two men-at-arms' helmets, two bunches of tangled equipment, box respirators, and a bunch of pink telegrams to former occupants. The reek is of burning grease, which filters in from the dark passage where a few orderlies and a bat-man are boiling a billy of water. Their low hoarse voices mingle with the monotonous *tump-tump* of a pump working in the distance, for these tunnels are underground in the neighbourhood of Ypres, and, though they are driven into the only high ground in the parish, water, omnipotent at lower levels, seeps through even here. On the upper bunk in this cell, where the air is most impure,

sprawls a figure, covered by a macintosh, its field boots caked with mud, its head pillowed on its jacket. The face is young, but white and bloodless, seeming hardly to breathe. A reddish growth of three days bristles through the duller deposit of mud. This is Bay Jenkin, adjutant of the 13th Swallowtails, aged one-and-twenty, and with two years' experience of active warfare. Below him on the packing-case sits Martin, his hair ruffled over his forehead, but his face clean down to his neck, where a dark line betrays the shortage of water for more than shaving purposes. He is studying two messages, which have just come. He turns from one to the other and shakes his head. He shouts, "Johns, any food?" A dark and exceedingly dirty face peers through the curtain of sacks marking the entrance, asks—

"Which'll you 'ave, sir, breakfast or lunch? There's bacon and maconochie," and hovers grinning over the *carte du jour*.

"Maconochie, and see I get plenty of gravy. Any potatoes? Good. Send a runner to tell the M.O. lunch is ready."

He turns to the upper bunk and shakes the limp figure. "Jenky," he calls. "Jenky." The figure groans and slowly opens its eyes. Then it smiles thoughtfully at its summoner and says, "Curse you, Martin, I was dreaming peace was declared, and I was in Piccadilly talking to a beautiful lady."

"Well, it's only peace until two o'clock. I've got to see the brigadier." Jenkin whistles and sits up.

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"So we declare another war. Well, well, what d'you want?"

"Lunch and the company strengths."

"All right. Give you that in ten minutes. Runner, where's Sergeant Ashby got his home? Third on the right? Good." And, shivering slightly as the tunnel draught catches his newly awakened body, he disappears.

Four days earlier the 13th Swallowtails had taken over a patch of newly conquered territory in a desolate spot known as "the Minories," a neck of high ground set between streams which shell-fire had broadened into treacherous marshes many feet deep, crossed by two single duckboard tracks, exposed day and night to gun and machine-gun fire. Not only did the place have all the usual unpleasant features of war, lack of cover, ceaseless shelling, trench mortaring and machine-gunning, a long and exposed track of communication, dead bodies, and the other rotting refuse of war, it was actually a position of extreme danger since it was precariously held and could be easily assaulted by the enemy, who would be able by a strong concentration of guns to curtain it off from assistance until the attackers had dealt with it. Two days after the Swallowtails had arrived, the Germans had set about them in a dawn fog, and after five minutes strict attention to gun-fire, had attacked. In the morning mist, the red-green-red lights of the English S O S signal had been invisible, and the Swallowtails had had to fight it out unaided by any artillery save one Stokes mortar handled, as Stokes mortars invariably are, by a Bolshevik subaltern and a

gang of anarchistic hobbledehoys. The attack had been beaten off, but the Swallowtails had lost heavily. An hour later, Martin had been summoned to battalion head-quarters. A heavy shell, falling directly on the roof of the old gun-pit where it was established, had wiped out in its explosion not only the colonel, but the majority of the personnel of the battalion staff. The only survivor among the officers had been Jenkin, the adjutant, who had had the luck to be with the M.O. in another emplacement, and a few signalmen and runners. Martin, as senior company commander took over command of the battalion. That night they were relieved, and the relief was carried out in the midst of a whirlwind of shelling. It was not until three o'clock in the morning that Martin and Jenkin staggered into Dyke Tunnels, flung themselves wearily on to the sagging wire and, without parley, fell asleep. The remnants of the four companies could not be accommodated in the dug-outs, and sheltered miserably and dangerously in some trenches a few hundred yards forward, cut in what had once been the undergrowth of a small copse, named, cartographically, "Truro Wood," but now, alack ! felled by the engines of war ; one sliced and beheaded trunk alone stood, a spiky, defiant witness to the truth that this torn acre had been once a leafy covert.

Martin put away his maconochie with the philosophy of experience, and drank a cup of tea, heavily laced with whisky. Jenkin had returned with a sheaf of greasy notes, and read out the figures.

"A Company,—three officers and fifty-two o.r.

B,—they copped it worse—only Palairret and seventeen men. C, two and forty-nine. D, Hazelden and sixty o.r. H.Q. . . . You, me, Sergeant Ashby, Corporal Hone and seven signallers, five runners—six are still under the concrete, poor fellows—your batman and mine—I sent down the C.O.'s . . . and the aid post. Lemme see, that makes nine officers and 202 all told . . . less the Doc's aid post—and the sick—156 casualties in three days. How many this morning, Doc ? ” He turned to the M.O., a tall thin man, who was occupying Martin's bed with a mug of whisky, a bacon sandwich and a month old copy of the *Nation*, the relic of some passing intellectual.

“ Six . . . four slightly wounded, and two of your signallers.”

“ What's wrong with them ? What d'you let 'em go down for ? ”

“ P.U.O., dear boy. Temperatures 100 and 102.”

“ Oh damn ! ”

“ What were the wounded, Doc ? ” put in Martin.

“ All this morning . . . shrapnel. They're having a pretty bad time down in Truro Wood, Martin,—ought I to call you 'sir,' you're far too young,—just slow shelling the whole morning. And this,” he added bitterly, “ is supposed to be a bit of rest for the troops.”

“ Well we shall be out in a day or two. They can't send us in again with this remnant.”

“ Don't you kid yourself, Martin. What ! with a hundred and ninety good men and true left : they'll expect us to take Berlin to-morrow ! ” Jenkin laughed sardonically. “ Tell the brigadier to re-

serve me the diplomatic suite at the Adlon," he called after Martin.

Martin called his runner, and was climbing the narrow stairs. Bright October sunlight filled the opening, shining like the Urim and Thummim, and blinded him after the smoky gloom of the tunnel. He pushed between the men sheltering in the adit and stood blinking in the open. From this point he could see the panorama of the country east and south-eastward, from the bare crest of the Minories, across Hereford Forest and down into the plains of the promised land, where, far out of the reach of guns, lay delectable villages and towns, their church spires balanced on the dark haze of orchards. To his left lay the tortured carcass of Truro Wood, apparently bereft of life, and, as he looked, a bunch of black smoke appeared over it, as if released by an invisible hand, curled downwards with sinister intent and disembodied slowly into a brown and then yellow smudge upon the sky. The sullen crunch of the explosion arrived five seconds later. "Not even head cover," he reminded himself bitterly, thinking of his harassed and so much enduring company.

"'Ouldn't stand there if I was you, sir," said a voice behind. "Been shelling this place somethin' crool all day. One's just about due . . ."

There was a rush as of ten thousand angel's wings, a thump and then the splitting death agony of a six-inch shell. It had burst behind the mound that sheltered the entrance, and nothing worse than a shower of blackened earth troubled the group at the pit-head.

“Come along, Woundy.” Brigade head-quarters lay in a similar mine a hundred yards away across a neck spanned by a broken duckboard track. They plunged again into blackness, and at the bottom found the brigade office, a slightly bigger version of Martin’s own cell. General Pennant was leaning back meditatively, smoking a pipe, while he watched Wilde, the brigade major, plotting out lines and points on a map from a sheet of instructions.

“Ah, Ord, I’m glad to see you. Very sorry to hear that Colonel Evans is dead. I liked him. You haven’t a second in command, have you? No. Well then, you must take charge of this attack.”

Martin’s mouth went dry. He stammered and at last said—

“You know we’re practically finished, sir? I’ve only a hundred and ninety men left now and there’ll be a lot more casualties in Truro Wood to-day if this shelling goes on.”

Wilde raised his head abruptly and said—

“A hundred and ninety—you’re lucky. ‘S more than enough,” and seeing Martin’s look of dismay, went on more kindly: “It’s all right, Ord, only a two company matter. You could do it with half the strength. Come round here and look at the map. Do you see this line? Now listen.”

For an hour they talked plans. The division was the right flank of the assault line. An attack would take place just at dawn in two or three days’ time. The Swallowtails were to advance wheeling right, capture a group of three pill-boxes and join up with the flank of the Trimmers, the right battalion of the next division; their own right flank would

remain stationary. At last Martin rose to go. The general shook him by the hand.

"That was a very stout show your fellows put up yesterday. Division and Corps are immensely pleased. There's a telegram, isn't there, Wilde, for the Swallowtails?"

Martin hesitated a moment.

"Am I definitely to take command, sir? I ask because I've a message from our quartermaster to the effect that Captain Brian Sharlow has just reported to join the battalion, and he's senior to me."

"Sharlow? Sharlow? Who is he? Know anything about him? Has he any experience?"

"None, sir: he was assistant adjutant with our reserve battalion at Dover."

"Then put him in charge of a support company. Have him up to-night. He'll learn a lot in the next few days."

"Very good, sir."

He turned to go, but Baring, the staff captain, who had come in, said, "Oh, Ord, your brother—isn't it, G.2. at Corps—wants to speak to you. You can telephone from the signal office."

Martin went into another room. He could hear Mike's voice very faintly. "Had a letter from young Deborah—says Brian is posted to you—wants me to look after him—do what you can."

Martin replied with a brief, "All right."

He climbed the stairs again, and, as he walked over to the other tunnels, threw a glance eastwards. Truro Wood was tranquil: a tiny black figure rose out of the ground, stretched, and disappeared again. Beyond it, he could see the fateful ridge of the

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Minories, whence they would attack in three days' time. Nothing moved there; round the monolith concrete shelters not a movement; the barren waste had a sulky, sinister appearance. Far away to the north, the rumbling rhythm of a barrage tossed and swayed. The moment's peace was only a mirage.

Back in the brigade office, the general was saying, "That's a pleasant youngster, Wilde," and the brigade major answered, "A damned good officer, sir; he don't ask foolish questions."

Martin returned to Jenkin.

"I say," grinned the adjutant cheerfully, "have you heard the awful news? They've sent out Sharlow at last—and to us. We'll learn him, the shy-ster."

"Shut up, Jenky," Martin answered. "Brian Sharlow ain't a bad cove. It was just his luck that stuck him at home. Anyhow, he's a kind of relation of mine, so you can exercise your tact."

"Oh, sorry. What are you going to do with him?"

"Send him to D. I've wired Carey to bring him up with the rations. Do you know he's senior to me?"

"So I suppose you'll let him take charge of all of us, eh?"

Martin grinned. "Not by a long chalk. . . . Look here, orders for attack. Just go through them and see if they are clear to you. I'll talk about them later, and I'll go up to Truro Wood after rations with Sharlow. Now keep quiet and I'll try to get a nap."

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He lay down on his wire bed and tried to sleep. Down here it was quiet ; a very long way off he divined guns thumping, but it was pressure rather than sound. The men in the passages had had their tea and were dozing : occasional footsteps were the only disturbing noises : but sleep would not come. Mike's voice : " Look after him—do what you can," echoed in his ear. Well, what could he do ? The attack would be a failure, or, at the best, not a complete success ; they would get it right in the neck as the flank battalion, would be shot up from all sides, and all day ; they would have a huge percentage of casualties crossing those two hundred yards ; they would inevitably be counter-attacked and they would be lucky if they were still holding the position on the next morning ; and he was to look after Sharlow. He knew as if from her lips that Deborah did not love her husband, and guessed that only her native decency had made her write that to Mike. He had heard, from the lips of Jenkin and several others, unamiable stories of Sharlow at Dover, tales that made him writhe. The fellow would be better dead, but he, Martin, would be no King David. " Put ye Uriah in the fore front of the battle." No, this little Uriah should be tucked up carefully in bed, always allowing that the—what was the phrase—" exigencies of the campaign " did not haul him out shivering into the unfriendly atmosphere. Martin half hoped that a shell would fall among the transport on the way up and deliver him from his problem. And Deborah ? He suddenly felt a thirsting desire to see her, to have her by him, a passionate resentment

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that he had been so slow to perceive his own heart, and a furious rage that what should have been his should be the property of this swarthy, tippling Thraso. He swore to himself that he would achieve Deborah by hook or crook, when this nightmare war should end : and then with a revulsion cursed himself for a fool : of course, Deborah would stick to her Brian, damn him ; and he was a fool to waste his mind in bitter, unavailing dreams. Well, Sharlow should have the reserve company in this next show. It was little enough, he knew only too well, but he could arrange that. And to Deborah, he would give no more thought. Nevertheless, phantom images pursued each other behind his eyelids ; dreams of desire, and anger, of envy, of cruelty and of love tore his sleep in shreds. He was haggard and weary when Carey, the transport officer, tapped his crop on the door-post and thrust his burly macintoshed figure through the sacking.

“All correct,” said Carey. “The carrying parties have the rations and water and the mail. I’ve brought up twelve boxes of bombs and four of S.A.A.—and the new officer. Sharlow his name is, no connexion of André, he tells me, but a powerful toper and the hell of a swanker. Seems to think he’s going to command the battalion.”

“He is not,” replied Martin. “Where have you left him ? ”

“Sitting down upstairs. He was a bit blown after slogging up from the Spoil Bank. We left the horses. I don’t mind losing a mule or two, but I can’t spare horses.”

“Shelling much ? ”

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"Nasty little do on the batteries in Valley Wood, but the road was all right. Our new acquisition seemed impressed, quite impressed. I'll send him down. Anything you want? No? Well, s'long, old boy."

A minute or so later Brian Sharlow pushed his way into the cell. During the three years since Martin had first seen him, his face had changed; continuous office work, together with a more than moderate absorption of alcohol had added considerable weight to his jaw; the face had grown fleshy; creases were engraved beneath the eyes. He and Martin had mutually avoided one another at the depot, except on the most formal of business. He was still a personable man, but the march up from the Spoil Bank had puffed him and the unaccustomed weight of the pack had made his shoulders ache. He resented this almost more than the public opinion which had at length dispatched him to France; and in an obtuse way, blamed Martin not only for his fatigue, but also for his presence. Hostility gleamed in his eyes. He ignored the offered hand, but accepted ungraciously from Jenkin a mug of whisky and chlorinated water. The adjutant winked at Martin across the dark head.

"To what are we indebted for this honour?" he began in his impish voice, but Martin hurriedly interrupted him with a gruff, "Glad to see you, Brian." Sharlow ignored Jenkin, and turning on Martin, asked, "Well, what's the position here?"

Martin affected to misunderstand the import of the question.

"The position is that we were counter-attacked

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yesterday morning, lost the better part of the battalion and shall be attacking in a day or two's time."

"The colonel was killed, I'm told. Who's in command now?"

"I am until they supply a worthier substitute, a senior officer."

"Well, as I'm your senior, I suppose I take over the battalion from you?"

"Afraid not. The brigadier has told me to carry on."

"I suppose you didn't mention me?"

"On the contrary," Martin answered in a level voice, "I mentioned you to him a few hours ago. He asked what your experience out here was. I told him—how could I do otherwise?—nil. So he told me to carry on and to give you a company."

"I don't believe you."

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Really, Brian, why should I lie? And if you don't credit my tale, brigade office is only a hundred yards away, why not ask the general yourself?"

Sharlow sat down heavily on the packing case.

"It's a plant," he muttered, "a regular swindle. I might have known with you . . ."

Martin cut him short sharply. "Brian, understand me. I don't care a damn who commands this battalion, so long as he knows what to do. If you'd been here only a week, I'd hand over gladly to you. But you don't know a thing, not a single thing, and it's obviously unfair to the men to let you command. Now do you see?" He kept himself in hand and tried even to plead with his last

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words, but Sharlow put his head down and glared at the ground.

"Oh, all right," he said at last, emptying his mug.

"Another drink?" inquired Jenkin politely.

"Don't mind if I do." He took it neat this time, four fingers in a pint mug.

Martin was in the meantime hitching on his respirator, and belt. He felt miserable and tired with this futile wrangle; and querulous of the evil genius that had sent him Deborah's husband.

"Ready, Brian?" he asked. The dark man looked at him suspiciously.

"Where are you going?"

"I am taking you over to your company, D."

"Shan't I spend the night here?"

"No. In the first place, you've a company to take charge of. In the second, there isn't room." Martin spoke roughly in his exasperation. "Now finish up your liquor and come along."

He was not a little staggered by the unwelcome guest's consumption of whisky: he must have had pretty good practice, Martin reflected, to swallow so much unmoved. Sharlow struggled into his equipment. Then, perhaps slightly ashamed of his previous behaviour, said, "I'm sorry to have said those things," and Martin was glad to answer, "Oh, that's all right."

The moon was shining coldly when they came to the surface; and the guns almost quiet. A duck-board track led them towards Truro Wood. Every now and then a shell hummed through the air, malevolent bird, winging its way towards a distant

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prey. They found the companies in a medley of battered trenches, which had been a strong point, huddled under small elephant shelters or simply taking cover beneath ground sheets spread over holes hollowed out of the friable earth. Martin caught Palairt, the only surviving captain beside himself, and told him to find Sharlow shelter. Then he introduced Hazelden, a sharp Cockney boy in charge of D Company, to his new commander and left them to settle down together. He walked round the wretched bivouacs, asking questions and suggesting improvements.

Later in the evening, Jenkin delivered himself of his opinion of Sharlow. "Don't you give him a chance, Martin; I know his sort and I know him. He'll let you down somehow, somewhere, and be as innocent as be-damned when it comes to finding out what happened."

"Oh, rot. He's only fresh."

"Fresh. I'll say it. And when you're up in front of a Court of Inquiry to know just why your D Company wasn't there when it was wanted, or why it retired, you'll find out all about it."

"You're talking through your hat, Jenky," said Martin equably, as he drew his boots off. "Anyhow, I'm not going to worry myself with believing Sharlow a Macchiavelli, and he'll take D Company into the show come Tuesday. Blow the candle out when you've finished. Night-night."

During the next two days they overhauled themselves and took stock. The battalion was re-organized to three companies of about seventy men each, but the daily slow bombardment of Truro

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Wood was reducing their man power a little each hour. Martin led his company commanders, Palairret, Sharlow and a subaltern named Fane, up to the Minories and surveyed the point they were to capture. Martin looked at Sharlow curiously as they walked back through a wood like a gigantic young hop-field. The dark man had made no observations during the morning, had asked no questions, had only grunted in an uninterested way when localities were identified and pointed out to him : he seemed lethargic both in his mind and his movements. Martin drew Palairret back as they neared Truro Wood, and, nodding towards the big plodding back, said, "What's he like?"

Palairret shrugged his shoulders. "Slow. Rather a dud I should say. Don't do very much, loafs, sleeps most of the time, so far as one can sleep in these shelters, and drinks a powerful lot of whisky. By the way, I wish you'd send us up three bottles. We shall want it to-morrow at the rate this man puts it away."

Before he left them, Martin said, "Remember, A leads off at nine to-night sharp, C follows and D last. As soon as A and C have gone over the top, D takes over the front line. Zero is 5.55 and we go over at zero plus three. I'll send a man with your watches at 8.45 to-night. I shall be in the little pill-box just behind A, and all reports to me there. Good luck."

It was ten o'clock and a fine clear night, when the head-quarters of the Swallowtails emerged from Dyke Tunnels. The moon was slowly sinking ; there would be another hour of its fitful help. The

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track lay past Truro Wood, and Martin was glad to see that the shelters and trenches were empty. He looked back at his small party, Jenkin, the doctor and a dozen black figures silhouetted against the sky. These groups often made him think of the Forty Thieves, as they lurched slowly forward, bent beneath their equipment and the sandbags containing their rations. The "army barrage," fired thrice a day, when every gun on the front thundered without let for two hours, had spent its paroxysm, and now only a few heavies were slowly wreaking their anger on selected points, searching for carrying parties or relieving troops. Two miles ahead stood the dim hummock of the Minories, and from beyond, lights streamed up, flared and died away. All was quiet on the Western Front. The duck-boards ceased abruptly and they followed, by eye, by touch of foot, and by their sixth sense, a track between shell-holes that had been worn into the semblance of a path by hundreds of unhappy passengers like themselves. They plunged into the shadows of Colinton Forest, once with its artificial lakes the "wilderness" of some magnate's estate. Now it was a wilderness in very truth, the undergrowth rusty, and the thorns of iron; wire rustled where brambles had waved; and for the scent of violets, bluebells, mint or thyme, synthetic odours of a dozen malefic gasses and of picric acid hung clouded over the soiled, stagnant water, released from its parent lake and re-enclosed in shell-holes by more recent landscape gardeners. A little wind sprang up and swung the maimed branches playfully to and fro; and the bare trees shifted uneasily

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with creaks and whines. Shells were falling with obstinate regularity round the duckboard bridges across the lower marshes, but Martin and his party watched their chance and scuttled over without harm, while a machine-gun from far away rattled its futile threats above their heads. Twenty minutes later, they had come to the squat dice that would be their shelter until one more in the long line of miracles should perhaps release them.

Martin squatted beside the colonel of the battalion they were relieving, thankfully accepted a drink and asked for news. "I was glad of that," he said, as he set down the empty mug, "it's hot walking."

"You won't be hot long, my boy," said his opposite number, a fat little man, in civilian life the chairman of an Insurance Company. "I've been shivering ever since I came in here. They've got the place absolutely taped and they've been playing cat and mouse with us all day. A perfectly beastly thing dropped just behind me as I was coming in this afternoon—and, well, look at my breeches" (He exhibited a long rent). "I'll have a new pair out of the army for this, if I spend the rest of the war gingering up my member to ask questions in the House. Have another drink? You'd better have it without water this time. It tastes less beastly and we're short. Do you know, all except two of the water-cans that came up last night were punctured by shell-fire and empty."

"Have my soldiery come up yet?" asked Martin.

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"Your left company came past half an hour ago and your right's just gone past."

"Then you ought to get away in about an hour."

"It won't take long to get my boys out—what there is left of us. I reckon we're not more than a company, all told, after four days of this. Never was such a hell of a place. The Somme was positively mediæval in comparison."

The talk ran on, the usual exchange and comment of army shop. A runner came in with a note from Palairet. "A Company relief complete." Ten minutes later another announced the relief of C. Only D, Sharlow's company to come. They ought to be through almost immediately. Martin looked at his watch ; it stood at 2.30. The colonel slipped into his equipment and sat waiting for his release ; the talk flagged ; nothing happened. Martin went to the entrance and found Jenkin superintending the storage of spare bombs and extra cans of water.

"Have you seen anything of D ? "

"No. Aren't they in ? "

"Damn it, don't answer me with foolish questions," said Martin irritably. "Run over and see if they're there."

Jenkin looked at his watch and whistled. "Three o'clock ! Righto. Back in ten minutes." Martin leaned against the door pillar. The moon had set, but the melancholy waste was lit by the fitful flares : shells were falling along the farther edge of the ridge, their smoke drifting whitely along the ground. An occasional sharper explosion behind him, warned Martin that the enemy had begun to drop trench mortar bombs on the front line. In

the babel of sound, his own mind seemed to stand still. He stood gazing with itching, unwinking eyes into the murk, and was surprised to see Jenkin, panting and dripping with sweat. "I've been back as far as the beek," he gasped. "There isn't a sign of them. I've sent off two runners, James and Hastings, to beat the woods."

Martin turned back into the dugout. "My blasted D Company seems to have lost itself," he told the colonel. "I shall have to go out and look for them. Sorry to keep you waiting."

The other shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Nothing ever did go right with a relief yet, my dear Ord. Thank heaven there's a drappie in the bottle. I knew I was sanguine in donning my battle harness. Well, let me know when you're through, but I'll be obliged if you'll give me and my companies time to get to our burrows before the battle starts. It's 3.30 now."

A feverish desire for action took possession of Martin. Calling his runner, he started running over the broken ground: only when he had measured his length twice did he realize that he would make better progress by walking. Even so, his mind drove his limbs forward at a pace that left Woundy sobbing with strained lungs when they stood at last in the shelter of the wall of a ruined pill-box, glaring here and there into the dark morass. Shells were falling near them and their wall constantly rang with the impact of pieces hurled against it with giant force. Gradually the guns switched farther over and left them free. At that moment, Woundy suddenly cried: "There, sir,

look there." Martin glanced to his right and saw a dark line of figures staggering up the hillside. He crossed to them and found Hazelden with the leading files of D Company. "Where the hell have you been?" he asked furiously.

Hazelden, exhausted with the effort of the hill, answered as furiously.

"You'd better ask that b—— Sharlow in the rear! Where've we been? Nearly to Passchendaele, I'd say. It wasn't till we'd crossed the road that I guessed things were wrong. I thought you'd shown him a new patent way of getting here. But when we drooled on, I found he'd lost himself: so I about-turned the company and came straight here. Thank God, they weren't shelling. Lead on, men."

Martin stood watching the company as it filed past. For six hours they had been walking over country where no two paces are level. Some were dead beat, only able to stagger on, semi-consciously, behind the man in front. Each still clung passionately to the bag of rations which alone might help him to endure the next twenty-four hours. Others, less worn out, panted curses against war, against the army, and in particular against their company commander, "the bastard," using a familiar obscene epithet that had lost all meaning from its constant reiteration. Only the company humorist, an irrepressible Cockney, seeing Martin, took up his patter. "'Ere we are again, boys. The captain's 'ad the war stopped specially for our convenience, so as we shouldn't miss anything. Thank *you*, sir. The orchestra can now resoom. Gents are specially requested not to spit." One or two

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chuckled ; another cursed him fluently ; but the rest took it as they took everything else, unheedingly, dully. Behind the limping corps came Sharlow. Though he carried less, he was as exhausted as the worst. Martin caught his arm.

"Damn you for a fool," he raged. "I thought that even *you'd* be able to follow a track. Get along, man, get a move on. You've only an hour left."

Sharlow glared at him, but he could say nothing. He ran his tongue across his lips and gave Martin a look of murderous hatred, but the other had flung away. He reached his head-quarters and bade the waiting colonel be off, apologizing in husky tones for the delay.

"All right, old chap," he was assured. "All in the day's work. Come along, Tiny ; just time to get home before the storm if we hurry."

Martin sat down, and let his head fall on his chest. He was feeling all in, and noticed that his hands and knees were trembling. There were still fifty minutes before the barrage opened. He lurched to his feet, and made his way into the front trench, fifty yards in front of the head-quarters. The men crouched in the gully, huddled under ground sheets, but already the N.C.O.s were going along waking such as had achieved unconsciousness. Machine-gun bullets were crackling with ever increasing frequency as the subtle sense of waking day stole upon the armies. Trench mortars had started on the battalion on the flank with ominous insistency. Martin found Palairt and Fane, and gave them his last instructions, instructions they

had heard before, reiterated now because there was simply nothing to say. Then he went back and found Jenkin trying to read George Moore's new book, "The Brook Kerith," by the light of a candle. "We've found touch with the battalions on the flanks," he told Martin, "and I've got a runner relay-post over to the other side of the ridge, where the signallers have dug in. They can't keep a wire going, but they've got a lamp that brigade can see. Only, brigade can't reply because they're shelled out every time they show a light. . . . Gosh, I'm sleepy. . . . Always feel like this before a show."

"Needle," commented Martin. "Ten minutes to go (Give me a cup of tea, Johns). This always reminds me of waiting for toggers at Oxford with all the coaches along the bank counting the last seconds before the gun goes, all at different paces, and the gun goes off either late or early."

A gradual tightening atmosphere grew upon the watchers as zero hour drew nearer. The men became silent. One made a jest *sotto voce*, only raising faint grins. Martin looked at his watch, and began to count.

"Ten—nine, eight—seven—six—five—four . . ."

The throats of many thousand guns opened at once, roared, shrieked, and cracked: a torrent of sound rushed down and overwhelmed them.

"I told you," shouted Martin, as he and Jenkin made for the door, "they never go off right."

They gazed out into the maelstrom. The cataract was falling two hundreds yards in front, a whirling curtain of brown smoke, lit up by the flash of

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exploding shrapnel and arabesqued with Chinese white festoons. Against this dun background, Very lights hung and sank overwhelmed : one trail of sparks shot up and on its graceful stalk blossomed a double emerald flower.

"There's their S O S. Now for it," said Jenkin.

"A Company ought to be in by now," said Martin. The words were confirmed by a sharp crash at the side of their shelter. The German call had been quickly answered. Suddenly through the murk appeared a running figure, behind him several more. The figure stopped at the old front line trench and made a motion : his followers jumped. It was a corporal with some prisoners. He brought them to the dugout, and tucked them in under the wall. They were unclean, unshaven, undersized men, but, except for the field grey, not very different from the average British infantryman : the fear of death troubled their eyes.

"A Company got the dugouts all right, and Captain Palairt says as 'ow 'e's diggin' in," the corporal reported. "An' can you send 'im a dozen boxes of 'and grenades ?"

"See to it, Jenkin. D Company carrying party," rapped Martin. "Many casualties ?"

"Just a few at the beginning, I think, sir, but nothing after we got there. They 'ands-upped—'Leven prisoners, sir." Martin ran his eye over the captured covey.

"Only ten here."

"Then I must 'a lorst one of 'em, sir ; there's a machine-gun on the right firin' fit to blow yer 'ead orf."

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“Well, get them down to brigade and take this message.” The corporal clicked his heels and shooed his covey into movement. “Come along, cullies,” he said.

Presently Jenkin reappeared. He was red in the face and swearing hard. “The bloody fellow, oh the bloody fellow. D Company hadn’t moved. I found Hazelden ramping for orders and Sharlow—if you please—seated in his head-quarters as happy as a bug. I soon had him out and the company’s moved up. Carrying party’s gone too.”

For some time the shells had been falling heavily and more heavily on the front line. A few walking wounded tottered back and took shelter in the aid post. Stretcher-bearers brought in three or four more : they were laid in the passage and gradually, under the influence of morphia, ceased their groaning. Daylight was filtering through the smoke and dust. A message from C Company that they were on their objective. The British shelling on the immediate front of the Swallowtails lessened to the protective barrage ; the German, on the other hand, swelled each moment. Shells fell thunderously ; fountains of earth spurted upward ; black, choking smoke : the concrete walls swayed beneath the contending eddies of explosives, and the air quivered and shrieked as the heavy shells pierced their triumphant course. D Company just in front, Martin noted, was escaping the full blast of the tornado.

The light was growing strong now, under a misty sun : it was possible to see what was happening. The little group of shelters which A Company had taken, stood forlorn and desolate ; not a sign of life ap-

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peared ; an occasional shell dropped beside them. To the north the steady, purposeful barrage drummed on in rising and falling waves of rhythm. From a slit in the pill-box opposite came a lamp gleam, spelling out slowly, W-H-E-R-E A-R-E T-R-O-O-P-S O-N O-U-R L-E-F-T. "The Trimmers have failed," flashed into Martin's mind, and his left flank was exposed. Almost to the thought, a message was thrust into his hand. It was from the battalion on the left and said: "Our left company at P.17.d.o.5—P.17.b.1.3 Right company made no progress. We are attacking again at 10.30. Can you co-operate?"

Martin looked at his watch: it stood at 9.35. Time, he reflected, in these shows either rushed forward or lay down dead. He wrote a confirming message, and thought that the Boche would probably be into themselves long before that time. As he looked, a puff of smoke, followed by another and another showed him that the enemy had anticipated his thought and were already bombing towards the captured shelters. He beckoned to a runner and said: "Tell Captain Sharlow to take two of his platoons over to the left and support A Company. They can get along down that old cut by the road. Tell him the Germans are counter-attacking and to look slippery." A recollection of Pickwick floated into his mind. "'Never was such cards,' said the fat gentleman: 'Never was such luck,' said the hardheaded man. 'Miller ought to have trumped the spade,' inquired the old lady of Mr. Pickwick.'" The bombs were falling thicker in front, one pitched in the doorway. A Lewis gun

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was prattling. The runner returned. "All right?" asked Martin; and the man nodded. Martin could see the corner where the trench turned into the disused cut and ran forward. He expected men to pass it; but minutes fled by at a sickening pace and nothing happened. Suddenly he was tugged from behind. A squat lumpy figure, gasping for breath, blurted out: "Mr. Fane sent me, sir. Boche counter-attacking strong point. Captain Palairret's wounded and they've got into the left-'and dugout." Martin switched back to his view point. "Any D Company gone up yet?" he asked Jenkin. The adjutant shook his head. A bunch of childish, ineffectual oaths rose to Martin's lips, but none came forth. "Send me Sergeant Ashby and two boxes of bombs," he said instead, "Quick!"

A minute or so later Martin and his sergeant were among D Company. Sharlow was invisible, but Martin had no time for him. He saw Hazelden, told him to bring the left platoon, and himself led the way on hands and knees along the sour, bitter-smelling ditch. His labouring body as he dragged the box of bombs demanded every ounce of energy: he had none for thought. Abruptly, forty feet from the pill-box the ditch terminated in a vast shell-hole. From here he could see the doorway of his objective, and a grey shadow within. He pulled out the pin from a bomb and thoughtfully tossed the little black jar at the hole. Perfect! The explosion flashed just as it disappeared from the sunlight. Another, and another. Sergeant Ashby was following suit. He slipped over the edge of his refuge into a nearer, shallower de-

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pression. One more, and suddenly a dirty white rag fluttered from a slit in the concrete—the pill-box had surrendered. Almost at the same time, the English barrage fell on their left. The Trimmers were attacking again. Fifteen minutes later, he saw that they had got to their line and that the left flank was safe. Leaving Hazelden and his group along the ditch he clambered back into the old front line. He found Sharlow sitting dully on the floor of a concrete shelter, rolling a bomb to and fro in his hands, a much depleted bottle at his side.

He motioned the orderlies outside.

“Didn’t you get my message?” he asked.

Sharlow raised his head sullenly.

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you act?”

A shrug. “Oh, well, I didn’t know what to do.

. . . We couldn’t get along as you said . . .”

Martin looked at him, and suddenly, the big man crumpled up. “It’s awful . . . it’s awful,” he groaned. “I can’t stand it . . . The noise, and the beastliness.”

Half pitying, half angry, Martin watched him in silence. He was perfectly aware of the black abyss into which this soul was suddenly plunged, struggling with no means of support, save a broken will.

“There, there, Brian,” he said, patting him on the shoulder. “It’ll seem less beastly in time. You’ll grow your shell, like everyone else.”

“I shan’t, I know I shan’t.”

The bomb, rolling between hands, suddenly slipped. A click—the pin had been loose and the lever snapped away. In one movement, Martin

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bent, scooped the black jar and lobbed it out into the sunlight. A rush of violent anger surged up in him.

"Oh, you poor *bloody* fool," he said, and left the dugout.

They held to their newly won position all day and the next; and the enemy was content to let them, only shelling them with monotonous fury and accuracy. On the second night, ninety Swallowtails, cramped, stiff, weary and nerve-shattered, crawled away after they had been relieved, scarcely aware they were still alive. There was no semblance of discipline in their departure. It was a *sauve qui peut*. These men who had endured a pounding such as none had hitherto known, now, as they drew nearer to safety, broke and ran on their bent and aching feet. Not Jerusalem to weary Crusaders looked more akin to Zion than did the rotting canvas of Dead Dog Farm to these sorely smitten pilgrims. They fell asleep as they came, some even failing to unloosen their equipment; and so they were allowed to lie in heaps of human earth, until the kind fingers of nature should wake them.

Only for Martin there was no sleep. The face of Sharlow, twisting and grimacing, stayed before his eyes. Meditating as he sipped rum, lemon and hot water before a roaring fire in an old battery dugout, he tried to see some way out. Sharlow was just like half a dozen he had known or heard of, broken from the start, often willing, but quite incapable of carrying out their job in the face of so ingeniously presented horror. It would not matter, but for the

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battalion and the men they were supposed to lead. No man's nerves are to be derided, faced with what they had been faced during the last days; but others endured it, with a lack of complaint, with an honest decency. There was Deborah, too, and her message to Mike. Well, he had nursed Sharlow through one show, but in a day or so, a new colonel would arrive: and he might not, surely would not, be so patient. No help for Sharlow then: a court-martial if the new man was a martinet; the base, stripped of his rank, and drafted into a line regiment as a private, if he was kind. Oh, why had not some bullet mercifully disposed of Sharlow in these days? The problem was one he could not solve unaided. He remembered his elder brother. Mike had communicated Deborah's message. Let him, in his wider experience, advise. Martin found a sleepy orderly and got a message taken to brigade signals for transmission to Corps Head-quarters. Then he undressed and snuggled down into his flea-bag. The quartermaster's potent concoction of rum worked its invariable miracle, and he slept.

When he woke, he found a message saying that a car would be four hundred yards short of Vierstraat cross-roads at noon to bear him to Corps Head-quarters. He dressed and, aching with stiffness, made his way to the rendezvous. Sunk back in the saloon, as they swept down the hill he surveyed the fields emerging from under the slough of war; first, tawny ground, grazed with hoofs and feet, the Nissen huts snuggled between their protective sandbags, the windlass of a balloon section and the straining hawser, a fifteen-inch gun enthroned on

its truck and a patient engine to push this juggernaut to and fro. Now a field of cabbage, a pile of wurzels, a mound of beets, the dirty cottages of La Clytte, the Scherpenberg crowned by its windmill, posing for a Crome; over there Mont Kemmel with its waist of feathery trees; the convent at Locre where the kindly nuns gave you splendid boiling baths in receptacles fit for the suicide of a Petronius. Now, they were roaring up hill, between trees nodding mild amusement at the tragedy of their relatives just across the way; rich red earth comforted their roots and assured them of longevity. At last, a château and green-roofed, wooden chalets nestling among tall laurels, a picture in the Chinese style: XLth Corps Head-quarters.

Mike welcomed him affectionately and led him into the mess for lunch. Tall, clean, cool archangels with red tabs at their collars were introduced, inquired non-committally about the war, displayed a polite but moderate interest in the previous day's proceedings. Martin felt grubby and uncomfortable beside these sons of the morning, so consciously and equably fulfilling their destinies. He experienced a thrill of genuine sympathy for X, who had to go to hospital with a bad tooth, with Y, whose pony was being shod and who would therefore be deprived of his afternoon's exercise, and with Z, the officer on duty in G office that night, who complained of the draughtiness of that warm felt-lined hut. He felt he had died in his sleep and, shabby ragamuffin, had been translated into Paradise.

Closeted with Mike in his hut, Martin unfolded his tale. Mike gloomed and bit his nails.

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"Damn the fellow," he murmured. "Why couldn't he stay in England. I knew he'd be quite useless. It is just what Palliser always says about the members of the club in refuge from Zeppelins at Bournemouth and Cheltenham. 'Personal courage always appears to be in inverse ratio to the bulk of the subject.' I never could understand what Aurea saw in the fellow—or Deborah, for that matter. It must have been something, for Aurea's always right."

"Well, what am I to do?"

Mike pondered for a few minutes.

"Can't have a hanging in the family, can we? It makes it so awkward for the survivors. Lemme think—yes. We're short of an adjutant at Corps School. Shall we co-opt our cousin-in-law? It seems rather a ramp, especially as I'd like to get a good stout bird into it. Well, well, all right. I'll do it, and Master Brian can sit in his orchard, like Silence, and tope the merry hours away, and generally behave—on the strict Q.T.—like the Prussian officer."

"Well, do it quick, anyway. I don't want to see the brute again." Martin shivered at the memory of the scene in the dugout.

"All right. I'll just talk to Bally, your division's G2, on the 'phone."

He returned in ten minutes.

"All serene, kid. He reports to Corps School at Bretezeel to-night. The wire's out for him now. He'll be gone before you get back."

Martin stayed to tea and afterwards the smooth flowing car bore him on a cloud down to Vierstraat.

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Michael had patted him on the shoulder as they parted and said—"Well, if we haven't exactly done the Christian act, we've made it right for little Deborah. Good luck, my child, and look after yourself: for, believe me, nobody else will. Snaffle a job, and get out."

As they drew up, Martin saw the mess cart tittupping over the dented pavé. Beside the driver sat Sharlow, his British warm buttoned up to the neck. He grinned at Martin, and shouted airily, "Much obliged." And Martin, feeling a John Knox who has purged the congregation, waved an almost grateful farewell.

He walked back to the camp. As he passed along the duckboards, he heard the voice of Hazelden from one of the shelters, reading out the evening's orders. "To Corps School, Brentezeel! These, my beloved 'earers, are the rewards of virtue. In the next show I'm going to start running when the first gun fires, and I shan't stop running until they've posted me Commandant of the Staff College, Camberley, England for—the—duration."

CHAPTER XI

IN June, 1918, Mike, returning from leave, found that the car which he had expected to meet him on the quay had failed to arrive. He walked morosely across to the bar of the Folkestone, where he might find some better-found soul to give him a lift. Fate was kind. A large young man in Flying Corps kit was slowly degusting, with every evidence of pleasure, a long roseate drink. Catching Mike's eye over his glass, he nodded to the bar-tender an indication of repetition and having drained the last diamond from the tumbler he held, fell on Mike with much hearty ejaculation.

"Can I give you a lift? Now aren't you the lucky baby. Here I am with a tender specially at your service. I'm down here buyin' liquor for the mess. What d'ye say to a bite of food and a roll home in the dray? Fine, boy, fine!"

They dined gloriously at Mony's and about ten o'clock, Toby Bellenden wrapped Michael in a rug and packed him into the front seat of the Crossley.

"Got to pick up a couple of the lads at St. Omer," he observed as the car swung up the hill. "They'll be at old Mother Hunn's—know it? Young Billy the Kid's keen on one of the girls."

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Makes it a regular Sunday night pilgrimage—says it steadies him after a wet week.”

The tender tore over the ground and presently they found themselves in front of a dark doorway in a side street of St. Omer.

“I’ll run up and collect ’em,” said Bellenden. Mike snuggled down in the rugs and closed his eyes. He was roused by hearing a young voice saying shyly :

“I say . . .”

“Yes,” said Mike encouragingly.

“Excuse me, but are you going anywhere near Brentezeel ? XL Corps School. . . . I’ve got one of our fellows here, as blind as a bat, and I must get him home somehow. . . . Perhaps you could give us a lift if it’s on your way.”

“What’s this ? Lift ? Brentezeel ? Rather,” interrupted Bellenden’s voice. “Bring out your dead and we’ll park it in the back.”

“Oh, I say, thanks awfully,” said the youth, “I’ll fetch him now.”

“Don’t know how the P.B.I. exist without transport,” grumbled Bellenden. “That’s what made me exchange more than anything else. One can at least bring home one’s cabbages.”

A bumping echoed down the stairway and in a minute two bodies pitched through the entrance, the subaltern supporting a big, heavy figure which could only just stagger.

“Here you are. This way,” called Bellenden, switching on a torch. The light fell full on the bigger man.

“Great Scott, Sharlow !” exclaimed Michael.

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Hearing his name, Sharlow stopped in his lumbering stagger and peered towards the tender. He recognized Michael.

"Ord," he grunted. "Always Ords—Ords everywhere. Ords—Damn all Ords." He sat down heavily on the pavement and went on muttering to himself until the other two R.F.C. officers arrived and pitched him head foremost into the back, where he promptly went off to sleep. At Bren-tezeel he was lifted out and dumped on a doorstep.

"I'm awfully sorry," exclaimed his companion. "It's damned kind of you."

"That's all right," returned Michael grimly. "Only I don't advise Captain Sharlow as company in St. Omer for your next jaunt."

However, he kept his counsel, and the next time he saw his cousin's husband, no reference to St. Omer passed between them.

Five months later, Martin, shepherding the last files of the Swallowtails, was nearly thrown by his horse bucking furiously on being assailed by loud blasts on a motor horn. Turning, red faced, to curse the aggressor, he found Michael's face grinning at him from a saloon. "Where do you billet to-night?" he asked. "Good. I'm coming to dinner."

"Bring anything you can get," called Martin. "Rations are very short."

The Swallowtails were marching eastward. Three days in front masses of men in field grey were pouring over the Rhine bridges and casting their weapons into the sacred flood below. Save for the

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colour of their uniform, there was little difference between vanquished and victors. The Swallow-tails, short of food, their boots worn out, their feet broken on the Belgian cobbles, stumbled on, buoyed up only by their determination to seal their victory.

Mike reappeared at the hamlet where they were billeted, laden with parcels. "Foie gras, langouste, anchovies . . ." he recited, as he laid the packages down, "and six bottles of 1906 Montrachet. Not so bad for a city that has writhed under the heel of old Boche. And a laurel wreath in token of my office—the good natives thought I was the Prince of Wales; my driver told them."

"Demobilization's starting in a week or two," he told Martin later. "D'you want to get away quickly?"

Martin stretched himself. "Seeing that they're breaking up my home, I think so. If Ambrose'll apply for me, I might get off with the first. There'll be nothing for me to do, except run the canteen and try to keep the disappointed from feeling it. . . . Yes. And you?"

"I shan't make it as quickly as you; but I shall as soon as ever I can. By the way, have you heard the news? Brose has got a knighthood. Yes. Don't look so startled. It's a fact—'For services to literature.' Nothing like carrying the thing through thoroughly while you're about it. I wonder how much he paid, and to which party?"

Presently Martin asked—"By the way, how's our Master Brian?"

Mike grimaced. "I wish you'd got the brute

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killed. That's a nasty piece of work, Martin. How? Oh, I don't know. Negligible, easy-going to the point of viciousness. Can't refuse a drink . . . or anything else for that matter. I can't think why Deborah married him."

"You approved of him in those days."

"Mm. I suppose I did. He's gone all to pieces since then. He needs reconstruction almost as much as bleeding Belgium. Luckily the school has been one of my particulars, but I've had to keep a pretty tight hand on him."

"It's rough on Deborah. They won't have any too much money now Roderick's dead."

"No. By Jove, he must have lived up to the hilt; and of course he made nothing these last three years. Fanny has the house, hasn't she? What's she going to do?"

"She's let it to Ambrose, but that's about all she has to live on. Deborah hasn't a bean, nor has Brian."

Mike whistled. "That's a bad outlook. I wouldn't like to depend on Sharlow . . . 'Peace hath her victories not less renowned than war,' the poet says, but at least you get your bread and cheese in the army. Well, well, I must get home. Fifty miles and bad roads."

As he looked out of the car, he smiled and said: "We shall meet again in London. I look forward to it after four years of temporary divorce, Aurea, an' everything, you know. 'Brave cupids wave their wings.'"

Four weeks later Martin was back in London. It was raining through a dull canopy of fog; it was

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smelly ; it was muddy ; it was chilly and uneasily warm together ; it was, in short, a dog's island, he considered. His new clothes felt much too loose and much too tight at once, and he missed the comfortable encirclement of his Sam Browne : he kept putting up his hand to his head under the impression he had lost his cap.

He was on his way to the office. Ambrose had moved the offices from the elegant old house in Lincoln's Inn Fields as the business grew, and the firm was now established in a rectangle of ramshackle houses at the back of St. Paul's, near Warwick Lane. After smelling his way through the purlieus, Martin at last reached the dark entry, forbidding in its appearance as the old house had been welcome. No Albert now sat to cheer the hopeful writer towards his expectations. A portly figure with a crown on its arm and a polished baldrick curtly asked Martin's name and business ; and obviously regarded him as a poor relation bent on a loan when he submitted them. While he waited, the sinister machine-gun-fire of innumerable typewriters echoed down the dingy passages. There had obviously been no armistice in the war on the home front. Presently a tripping fairy appeared with his card. She was the first person who had smiled on him to-day, and he almost thanked her.

"Mr. Martin ? If you'll come with me, Sir Ambrose will see you now." She led him up grimy stairs edged with worn brass, and chattered. "Yes, it is dark. Mind that step. But one gets used to it you know. The war and so on, you know . . .

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There's another flight of stairs here. Puzzling, isn't it? When we get into the new building. . . ."

"What new building?" asked Martin.

"Oh, haven't you seen it? The new Ord building in the Strand. Of course that isn't much yet, but it will be one of the sights of London when it's finished. This is Sir Ambrose's room. Please go in."

In a shabby room, with untidy bookshelves and masses of papers, he peered at his brother, hunched over a pile of papers beneath an electric light. Ambrose was looking more haggard than ever; his clothes drooped from him; his hair had retreated to two side patches. He looked unfeignedly glad to see his brother.

"How do the spurs feel?" asked Martin. "Tricky things when you're not used to them."

"I leave 'em off most days," said Ambrose. "I don't feel they suit me."

"Did they stand you in a lot?"

Ambrose spread his hands.

"So—so. Less than you'd believe. It's the only commodity that's dropped in price since the Armistice."

"Pretty grimy here, aren't you?" said Martin, viewing the room distastefully. "What's this Miss Thingmebob—your secretary—tells me about a new building, the wonder of the age?"

"Oh, yes. Didn't I tell you in one of my letters? We've practically been forced to build. You can see what this place is like, and we grow so fast that we've got to move. You'll believe me when I say that there isn't a place in London really big enough

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to house us in future. On top of that there's E.P.D. which our gracious government considers absolutely necessary for reconstruction, so I talked it over with Sybil and we came to the conclusion that we'd be better off improving ourselves than supporting the country, since we are, in part, the country."

"I see. And now, what do I do?" he asked.

Ambrose shrugged. "Whatever you like. You could learn in here and take over the magazine group one day; or the book department. There's the works and the bindery across the river. The paper mills are down at Fairford. I've kept a room for you next door. See." He opened a door on his left and displayed a smaller room. "Fix you up here in no time."

Martin hesitated, drumming his fingers impatiently on the door. He felt lost. The change over from the quiet dignity of Lincoln's Inn Fields to this bustling business disquieted him.

At last, looking at his hardened palms, he remarked: "I feel that a can of oil and a bit of cotton waste is more in my line."

Still—there was his promise to his father. It looked as if that would have to go by the board now. The short hour of five years had actually sprung apart to an æon.

"Let me look round for a bit. I'll tell you in a day or two."

"Right," said Ambrose. "I'll take you along to see McPhater first with the magazines. Sybil runs the editorial and the publicity on the book side, but she isn't here to-day. I've got a fair lady

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who wants too much money, to beat down for her. She'll be here in ten minutes, so I'll leave you to McPhater."

After another tour through the passages they passed through a large cell filled with a score of girls dipping typewriters, and Martin was presented to Andrew McPhater.

The chief characteristics of the middle-class Scots townsman, whether he comes from Aberdeen, Glasgow, Ayr, Edinburgh or Falkirk, is absolute mathematical uniformity. Faced by a lawyer, a machine minder, a journalist or the owner of a sweetie shop, the foreigner will discover exactly the same level of intelligence, the identical outlook in life, the equivalent capacity in his calling, the same nationalism, the same humour, and the same topics of conversation: the quality may appear a defect, but it is the Scot's peculiar strength. Each one knows exactly where he will get off to the limit of his car fare. It is the only country where there is definitely a standard man, and Andrew McPhater was of the standard mould. At a hazard you would put him down Aberdonian and Church of Scotland, but he might equally easily have hailed from Glasgow and subscribed to the U.F. Kirk. In any case you would be infallible in believing that he drank whisky from choice and suffered with his stomach. His accent may be taken for granted: he was as bald as the majority of his countrymen over thirty. He gave Martin a bundle of his productions and was prepared to answer questions. Martin turned over the pile gingerly. So far as he could judge, each periodical was addressed to exactly

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the same type of female mind, the only difference being the class of pocket they appealed to: *The Woman's Corner*, *The Woman's Home*, *Maggie's Mag*, *Fancy Free*, *Flickers: the Journal of the Cinema*, *The Home Round the Corner*, *Home Secrets*, *The Young Woman's Weekly*, *The Boudoir*, ("That was a failure," commented Mr. McPhater from behind his elbow: "the gairls could'na pronounce it"), *Joy*, *Luxury*.

"That's a bonanza," said McPhater, "*Luxury*. It practically makes a girl think that three and elevenpence worth of what-not looks like a model by Jeanne" (he pronounced it "Jeen") "Lanvin."

"Make your Ford look like a Rolls-Royce by a slight operation to the bonnet."

"Aye—ye've got it. It's a winner every time. And this—" he indicated a flaming cover—"runs it verra close. That's for the flappers."

"I say," exclaimed Martin, glancing over a peculiarly noxious romance, "does this sort of stuff go to girls' schools? You said for flappers."

"Ah . . . I was forgetting you've been abroad a great deal. You're thinking of those nice kids with long black legs and black bows. No. A flapper has advanced in age. Nowadays, it's a young pairson of experienced maturity, beyond the age of consent. Even so, if you read, you'll find all our tastes exceedingly pure, chaste in fact. Serial writing is a verra highly developed art. Vairginity's got to be in danger throughout thairteen instalments, and only wrecked—ay, and legitimately—in the last. It takes some doing."

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"Don't you publish anything for men?"

"Men!" echoed his cicerone disgustedly. "What for would we be bothering wi' men? A man comes home at the end of the day tired out. What does he want—just a lay down and a snooze over the paper, do the puzzles, read about the gairden, what'll he back for the three o'clock the morn, curse the income tax and remember to write to his landlord about his overdue rent. Besides, the creature's no interested in any one thing. Some of 'em want moty-cars, some gowf, some bridge; ithers like fit-ba' or a bit of carpentry, or the Zoo. No. Men's no good. Now the wumman—that is, the hen we cater for—what does she do? As soon's she's given the house a kittle wi' a duster—no more—she's slidin' into her second pair of rale silk stockings, and she's awa' wi' her little baggie and her powder puff and her rabbit—what they ca' coney—coat over her puir miserable body—she's awa' up to Oxford Street to rub her nose at the shop windows and mebbe buy a yard of elastic for her knickers at Selfridges. She'll teeter up an' down there all day, the slut, and just gets home in time to put her guid man's supper on the table, and do the bed. I know 'em. Man! have ye never walked Oxford Street on a fine afternoon? Don't. It's frichtening; meellions of hungry women paradin' up an' down, dreaming a prince is going to present them with a Kolinski cape. It's our fault," he wound up lugubriously. "*Luxury* and the twopenny tubes."

"You're a misogynist, Mr. McPhater. What about all those girls out there?" Martin nodded

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through the glass door at fifty bobbed heads bent over machines and papers.

“Good lassies, good hard working little gairls; most of ’em keeping a worthless mother in clothes, meat and drink. But they’ll come to it. As soon as they hear the marriage bell, they’ll be off like their mothers.”

Martin spent a day in McPhater’s room, but at the end, he smiled and said: “I don’t think so. Not in my line, you know.”

“A was afraid so. Ye’ve still got yer ideels, puir lad, in spite of four years of warfare too. Well, well, let me tell you, Mr. Martin, it’s only the verra, verra wealthy can afford ideels; and most of them had them clawed off in gettin’ there. A’m not blaming ye, mind that, but ye can’t afford it, at least not in Ords’.”

On the following day, he tried the book department, and came back equally discouraged. Malling, the manager, had no interest whatever in the volumes he issued; that was Lady Ord’s department; she ran the authors and the publicity. Malling’s side was purely sales, and Martin received an eye-opener into Ambrose’s genius for organization, when he learned of the army of travellers that covered not only the British Isles, but the Empire, of the firm clutch that Ambrose had secured over the small country town trade, his ingenious financing of the overstocked stationer until the business burst and dropped ripely into his hand, leaving him with a series of retail outlets all over the kingdom, his price abatements, his remaindering of old quires to the bindery, and the subsidiary organiza-

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tion that dealt with this, his motto of "Sell anyhow at any price, everything is saleable ; only sell." His orders to Malling had been—"Drive your travellers ; drive them till they drop ;" and Malling had obediently driven.

"Not here, O Apollo !" murmured Martin, as he returned to his brother's room. He admired the brain that carried through these ramifying operations, that wasted nothing, as he admired a fine machine. But to spend one's life selling waste paper and waste brains to the masses : ready-made clothing was as attractive and more profitable. He was probably a fool to imagine anything better : it would be easier to take the job on, to play it as a game, and to enjoy a mastery over the admittedly difficult technique. Still not yet would he surrender completely to Ambrose's organization.

He found Sybil closeted with his brother. The prizes of success had wrought subtler changes in his sister-in-law. She had been handsome in an unformed way, when he first knew her, given to masses of dark hair and art frocks. Committees and the like during these years had gradually moulded her, thinned her. She had watched, learned and committed herself bodily to her dress-maker, her corsetière, her hairdresser. Her face had hardened into a rapacious set. Her body, well stayed, carried an admirably cut tailor-made, her hair was now bobbed and waved ; the smart cloche had been born in Paris but a week ago. A long cigarette holder projected from the corner of her mouth or was borne to and fro between enamelled finger nails. In short, as Martin saw, it was indeed

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"Lady Ord who, as everyone in Literary Circles knows, is one of the powers at Ord House, where, with her husband Sir Ambrose (inset) she controls one of the most powerful publishing organizations in London." One thing only remained. Sybil had never been able to drop the shibboleths of her early environment, the Congregationalist ministry in Hampstead. Strive as she might, they clung to her, inhibiting her, spoiling her pleasure, preventing her from that—perhaps too easy—acceptance of things as they are, that characterizes the post war decade. Unbidden there would rise to her lips the dogmas of the preacher, dogmas which she would hurriedly stifle in company where she was not too easy, but which would leap out unchecked against those whom she felt she could ignore.

"What do you think of it, Martin?" she asked. "Isn't it wonderful?"

Martin admitted that it was, and added: "We must be getting very rich."

"Yes and no," replied Ambrose. "The new building will dip us pretty heavily, and the banks have a lot of our paper. Still, we have an immense goodwill, and that is going to repay us well in the future."

"Didn't you read the last balance sheet, Martin?" asked his sister-in-law.

"Well, I did, Sybil, but I got it just before an attack and what with one thing and another, I couldn't understand a single figure: and when I looked for it later, I found I'd lost it."

"T'cha, how careless you boys are! Well, when are you going to begin work? And what are you

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going to do ? I think you'd better go to the magazines. Don't you agree, Ambrose ? McPhater's bound to crock up soon with the amount of whisky he puts away."

Martin grinned. "I haven't got the aptitude, and I don't like your magazines : they make me go all goosy. I'd lose you more circulation in a month than you'd find in a year. If it was the old business in Lincoln's Inn Fields . . . but that's done for. It used to be a decent and serene occupation until you started mucking about, Ambrose. Now you've got a great, noisy, vulgar boulder of a place. There's nothing left of the old Ords'. . . What about the Greek and Latin texts we used to do ?"

"They weren't paying," put in Ambrose quickly. "I sold 'em a couple of years ago."

"You mean you let 'em rot and then butchered them out of mercy."

"We can't afford to go on in your father's way," said Sybil sharply. "We've got to live."

"Live ? You call this living ? A hand-to-mouth existence on cheap rubbish. You'll find your stomachs damned empty one day."

"Don't be so coarse," said Sybil angrily, but Ambrose broke in with :

"You're talking schoolboy nonsense. The fact remains that the firm's four times the size it was in 1914 on the book side alone ; and our turnover big in proportion."

"And our costs ?" asked Martin sweetly. "All right, I'm not going to argue with you. You hold all the cards ; and mine's only an eighth share. I'm going back to the works."

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"Nonsense," Sybil cried. "That's quite impossible. You can't waste time down there. If you don't like the magazines, come in with me on the books."

"Heaven forbid," said Martin energetically. "No. I don't mean anything personal, Sybil, but I had quite enough of it with Quarles. No. I'll leave the seduction and conspiracy in your hands. The works, I think, it is, eh Ambrose?"

Ambrose hoisted his shoulders and turned to his wife.

"I'm inclined to agree with Martin, Sybil. The works have been the least profitable side of the business. We've had bad workmen and at least one bad strike. We do want someone with authority, who understands, over there: and Martin's training fits him for it."

"Oh very well," she shrugged. "If you're both against me, I suppose it will have to be. And, Martin, please don't talk about seduction to me. It is not a pleasant expression, even in business."

So, on the next day, Martin passed over Waterloo Bridge to the Ord Press, thankful to have escaped for the time being from his sister-in-law's clutches.

For the first time since his arrival, Martin felt that he was being accepted in an Ord department, without suspicion. Bruce's welcome was wholehearted. He sat Martin down and insisted on cross-questioning him about the war for an hour before he would talk business.

"My eldest was there. Ay, puir lad, he was cot on the March retreat. They starved him on one o'

they bitty islands in the Baltic, where it's as quiet as death itself. *Gairmans!* Never let me see another Gairman in these worrks. A'll shoot him. Ay! he's hame. His mother's feeding him like a babby. . . . An' now, sir, what's it you'll be wantin' ? ”

“ A home,” said Martin. “ There's no work for me up at the office. So I've come down here.”

“ A'm glad. Ye're a director ? Then mebbe we'll get something done at last. A've been at Mr. Ambrose—Sir Ambrose, I should say—with what's wanted putting to richts, an' a' he does is to blame me for ma cost sheets.”

Martin listened to the manager for half an hour ; then he went round the works, listening more.

“ See, Mr. Martin,” said his guide, stopping at one machine. “ This is what they send me to put on.” He snatched a sheet from the rack and offered it. “ Gosh, it's cruel ; the cheapest wood pulp, and, look, sir, the machine might ha' been in a snow-storm. Oh, ay, I know it's been war time and paper's been hard to get hold of, but things is better now.”

They spent the afternoon in discussion, planning, suggesting. In the end Martin said he was going to stay. Something could be done here towards placating his father's uneasy spirit. For four days he worked with Bruce and at last he faced Ambrose with a detailed scheme. He watched his brother as he read over the typed sheets. Suddenly he felt nervous : was this going to prove a cul-de-sac also ? At last Ambrose looked up. His face was expressionless.

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"It's a lot of money. What do you offer in return for the outlay?"

Martin grasped in a flash that he would have to bluff his way to his end. Still he had bluffed generals and brigade majors in his day, and knew the advantage is always with the man on the spot.

"Service," he said. It was a good Americanism picked up from a doughboy who had been attached to them for some days.

"You want to scrap these machines and put in those new German models? Doesn't sound very patriotic at this stage. Peace isn't signed yet."

"Oh, good heavens, Ambrose, you're not one of these hang-the-Kaiser ruffians, are you?"

"Oh, no, no. Electioneering nonsense, of course, but still we are technically at war with Germany still."

Martin looked at him with dislike. "It seems to me," he said, "that the only cultivators of 'olives of endless age' are in the Army of Occupation. It takes a good man who's been sitting raking in the shekels for four bellicose years to be really blood-thirsty."

Ambrose replied sharply: "That's only a sentimental tack. What I mean is that if we get these machines, and it leaks out, it'll give a pretty good handle to the editors in the Bassett group, the Swingletree Press and all the others."

"Well, we can't get 'em at a day's notice. Meissenhagens isn't a Woolworth store. Look here, if I order them now for delivery next December, will that satisfy your scruples?"

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"You promise adequate out-put, and a saving in costs?"

"I'll buy it. Don't you understand that you've let your machinery get worn-out and out of date? No wonder you can't get anything from the works."

They argued to and fro over more points, but at last Martin had his way. He was about to go, when something in Ambrose's face moved him to lay a hand on his shoulder.

"It's all right, Brose, you won't be let down. Tell me, when did you last have a holiday?"

Ambrose looked up wanly. "A holiday? I don't know. Let me see. I took a fortnight last June, though upon my word, I forget where."

"I suppose you spent a jolly fourteen days with a telephone at your elbow ringing your departments in turn."

"I suppose it was something like that. Do I look as if I needed one now?"

"You look as if you might blow out any moment. Why don't you get down to the South of France for two months? You're a shadow."

"I wish to God I could, but just now it's impossible. Do you realize that these years have, in their way, been easy. The fight is only just going to begin now. Could you pilot this show through all the financial shoals which keep appearing every day? I know you can't. I've got a new amalgamation maturing now which I must see through, and you want money and there's the new building. I sometimes wish to God I'd never touched it; but you can see that for another twelve months I can't spare anything more than week-ends. Then, with

luck, we'll be through the worst and I can take a rest."

"A bit different from our predecessors' lives, what?"

"Perhaps, but some of them worked just as hard, perhaps a simpler problem, but just as hard. Only like all organisms, a business has got to grow or to perish. It can't remain stable."

"It's nothing more than a regular Frankenstein's monster," said Martin discontentedly. "It'll gobble you up in the end, Ambrose. What do you do it for? Where's the fun in it?"

Ambrose looked at him grimly. At last he said bitterly: "Fun! Listen, Nipper. When our admirable father practically retired in 1910, do you know the firm was nearly bankrupt, that two more years of his easy-going, generous habits would have finished us off? I came in just in the nick of time. You'll remember some of the quarrels we used to have? There were many more like that, and worse. Oh yes, the Governor was a good man, a clever man, and an energetic man in 1870. He pulled the firm through then, but after the turn of the century, he became bored and let things down. So his inheritance became mine, and I had to act towards him as he had acted towards his senior partner years earlier. Of course, he resisted: of course, he dug his heels in, but I made him come my way in the end though he fought me up to the last. I appreciated his point of view, but it couldn't be carried out. The days of the publisher who was a patron of literature have vanished. It was inevitable. You boys thought him infallible, didn't you? But

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your allowances, your existence depended on me all the time—or on me and Sybil's money. I borrowed practically every penny she had to pull us through ; and we all owe her that. Yes, I know she's difficult and rubs all of you up the wrong way ; but she backed me nobly over six years, and I'll ask you to remember that. I don't think I shall ever forget those two years before the war. I used to sit at home in the evenings and shiver over the gulfs that opened at my feet. Then it got better and became a game ; the crises were less mountainous. I began to admire my own ingenuity, my cleverness, as I worked a coup or wangled a good deal. And so, gradually, nothing outside came to matter ; this place became my whole existence, until, as you say, it grew into my monster. Why don't I take holidays ? Because holidays bore me. Why don't I go away ? Because I cut off my own life when I do. In a way, I've killed myself. Now do you understand ? ”

As he talked, an excitement grew upon Ambrose : he had risen from his chair and was walking to and fro, half talking to himself. When his voice died away, he stood looking at the pool of light on the worn carpet. Martin watched him pitifully.

“ Oh, chuck it up,” he said at last savagely, “ sell out, and get away. There's plenty to do in the world, besides peddling trash to an ignorant public.”

Ambrose shook his head, and smiled.

“ You don't understand, you see. It would be tantamount to suicide for me to sell out. I haven't got any other life. In any case, it's impossible.

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The next three years are going to be more difficult than you have any idea. We're heavily dipped in all manner of directions ; we have got to find more and more money ; and no one can tell how long the present boom is going to last. If it drops this summer . . . " He spread his hands in a gesture of dismissal. " Run away, Martin, I've talked too much. You shall have your toys."

Martin had returned to his old rooms in Chelsea. Mrs. Kiggell, unimpaired by rationing restrictions, had received him with open arms and poured forth a lurid account of the war, such as has not yet been chronicled. In spite of the deliberate attack on it of the German air fleet and almost equally atrocious conduct of the anti-aircraft batteries, the house showed no change. Only the chair of Essex Poole was occupied by a ghost, a reminiscence, an echo of kindly, silly chatter.

Fanny Dare, when she let Salley Bushes to Ambrose, had moved to a tiny cottage on the hills above Marlow. She asked Martin to come for the week-end, mentioning casually that Deborah would be with her. Martin had rashly expended the whole of his gratuity on an ancient powerful car. He had used it once or twice. On days when it ran it was known as Hannibal ; on days when it sat down and made melancholy noises, it was referred to as the Brute. It was Hannibal this afternoon as he slid over the Hammersmith tram-lines and roared down the Bath road. He stopped for a moment as he topped the hill beyond Pinckneys Green, before sliding down into the Thames Valley. Through the

break in the trees he could see Salley Bushes winking in the afternoon sun, a jewel in its grey setting. It was like the memory of a vanished fragrance. A mile farther on, waving arms made him jam the brakes hastily and swerve three parts across the road.

“Deborah.”

“Martin.”

This was the reward, this was the home-coming he had missed. He flung open the door and wanted to put his arms round her. The bilious eye of an elderly rustic prevented him : he put in the clutch and slipped away. Their conversation was foolish, ecstatic, nonsensical and largely a matter of exclamation. Fanny Dare's greeting was as cool and kind as ever : she had never permitted herself an excess of emotion ; each had been schooled so that it was exhibited with the minimum of contortion, but behind her aloofness, the warmth could be felt coming, as it were, from a great distance. Her husband's death, her straitened circumstances, she accepted as part of the ordination of her life : why should she fuss ? Only for her daughter she kept hidden away a passionate love she would not betray, for fear lest Deborah should know it and be, in some intangible way, hurt.

For some hours they all talked at once, asking question after question, replying as quickly and concisely as possible, interrupting each other with—
“but tell me . . .” a spate of rapid interjection of what came first to the surface. After the top water had drained away, Fanny Dare left them. The night had drawn in, but the lamps had not

been lighted. Deborah sat crouched on a stool before the fire, her face shadowed by protecting hands ; Martin, his frame disposed enormously at ease in a long chair.

“What are you doing down here ? ” he asked.
“What about your department ? ”

“All over,” she said briefly. “They close it at the end of the month. This is my embarkation leave, before setting out into the harsh and chilly world.”

“What is going to happen to you ? ”

“Don’t know—find a job somewhere, I suppose.”

Martin considered this for a minute.

“What about Brian ? ” he challenged.

“Ah ! . . . Do you know, I haven’t seen Brian for eighteen months. He hasn’t been home at all. Every leave he went to Paris . . . Martin, somehow I don’t want to see Brian again. Am I being a beast ? No ? There are sides to Brian that I don’t like . . . and there are a lot of things that I don’t want to know . . . Mike hinted something when I saw him in October . . . Brian will be back in a month—Ugh ! ” She shivered.

“Can’t you manage a divorce ? ”

“No.” She shivered again. “It means dredging through all sorts of pools. I don’t want to. Besides, ’twouldn’t be fair to Brian. He doesn’t want a divorce. He wants me.”

“Would he divorce you ? With the greatest delicacy, I’d volunteer for the third party.” He tried to say it lightly, as a matter of no importance, whereas his heart was hammering and he wanted nothing but the girl who was staring into the fire.

"No, Martin," she answered definitely: she stretched out a hand and patted his knee in the darkness. "That's something between you and me. We'll keep that clean."

They sat for a few minutes in silence. Then Deborah shook herself and said—"It will settle itself somehow. In the meantime, I've got to find a job."

"Ambrose would give you one to-morrow."

"Would he? I can work, but I don't know a thing."

"He knows you, and that's enough. I'll speak to him on Monday."

At least, in this fashion he would have Deborah near him; she would be safer and he could always see her.

On his way back to London, he chewed over the situation. He wanted Deborah more than he had ever wanted anything in his life before, but how far did she want him? Then there was the disturbing Sharlow. A divorce had lost much of its sinister implication in the last years: he might consent, but if he did not, there would be no means of removing him. And further he had no liking for Martin. It was improbable that he would surrender for Martin's benefit. Hannibal coughed loudly twice, tucked his tail between his legs, and died.

"The Brute," said Martin, opening the bonnet.

Later he spoke to Ambrose about Deborah, and after a short consultation, it was arranged that she should be placed under Sybil in the publicity department. Three weeks later, when he had had

to go to the head office, he found her with inky fingers and pink face furiously scratching out words on an already much smudged and deboshed sheet of paper.

“Come here, Martin,” she ordered peremptorily, “and read through this tosh. Do people really write this kind of thing about books? It’s fierce. I find that this idiot—what’s her name—Janet Poulter, is much prized for—‘the discreet and reticent beauty of her characterization.’ Look at these press cuttings. Every man jack who ever noticed the book used identically the same phrase. And anyhow, what is discreet and reticent beauty? Is mine?”

He laughed. “Happy?” he asked.

“It’s hard work, but it’s fun,” she admitted. “Look, it’s five o’clock. You can stand me a cup of tea.”

He had received a day or so earlier a letter from Mike, saying that he was on his way back and that Martin must lunch with Aurea and himself on the day after his arrival. As he drove to Mike’s flat he wondered how soon with his brother’s return, Mr. Ferrars would be liquidated. The maid told him that his hostess was in the drawing-room; and he walked straight in. Aurea was sitting upright on a couch, her body rigid, her hands clenched. Michael leaned limply back against the mantelpiece. Both were pale and were looking at one another with such concentration that they were no more than aware of Martin’s entrance: but as he approached them, Michael looked up, and said with a bitter laugh—

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"Here's one of the hated family. Tell him, Aurea."

"Tell him what?" echoed Martin.

"My dear little brother, my sweet wife has just informed me that she no longer loves me and that she's off with another man."

"What nonsense," said Martin cheerfully, but the smile was swept from his lips by the look Aurea gave him; she seemed like a snake about to lunge.

"It's no nonsense," replied Mike wearily. "Tell him, Aurea."

"Since Martin has thrust himself in in this way," said Aurea coldly, "I have just told Michael that I have fallen in love with another man, and that I want to marry him. Is that intelligible?"

"She is very fond of me, but she loves him," interjected Michael sardonically. "Oh, my God!" His body seemed to give way and he crumpled up into a chair. Martin looked from one to the other bewildered.

"But, Aurea . . ." he began.

"Never mind, Martin," interrupted Michael. "You can't do any good. Besides, she hates you."

"Don't be so childish, Michael," said Aurea. "I only said I disliked your family as much as they dislike me. They're a prying lot."

"Who's the man, anyway?" cried Martin, exasperated by the wrangling.

"Stephen Ferrars."

"What—that!"

"Do you know him too?" asked Michael.

"Much good your prying eye has done."

"Michael, why will you be so vulgar?" said

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Aurea with disdain. "Yes, it is Stephen Ferrars. He needs me, and at least he does appreciate me, and doesn't, as all of you do, imply that I'm half witted."

"I never implied such a thing," rejoined Michael indignantly.

"Perhaps not, but your family does. They'd have liked to get hold of me just as they do of everybody, and make them one of themselves. You're all horribly acquisitive, even you, Michael."

"At least I loved you, Aurea."

"Yes, I know, I know," she answered impatiently. "That's the trouble. I am—oh, I'm very sorry for you, my dear, but what's the use? I love Stephen."

"Oh, all right; don't rub it in. Cuckolded by a bloody frock, eh?" An ill-becoming jauntiness came over his face, a desperate attempt to pull himself together. "What are you going to do? What, haven't you discussed it?"

"I wouldn't until I'd seen you."

"Well, I'll tell you. I'm going to clear out. I expect Mrs. Kiggell can give me a bed, Martin? If you like, I'll give you grounds for divorce."

"Don't be utterly brutal, Mike," she cried.

"All right then. When you want me to divorce you, drop me a line. If you could have my clothes packed, I'll send for them. And now—oh hell! good-bye, my girl." He stooped and kissed her before she could move. Martin noticed she was crying: but his brother caught his arm and drew him from the room. "Come on, come on now," he urged. Seizing a hat in the hall, he ran down the

stairs in front of Martin, and signalled violently to a taxi. As soon as the cab had drawn up, he flung himself into a corner. Martin directed the man to their club and got in. Mike was sitting with his head in his hands : Martin slipped an arm into his : there was nothing to say. Presently Mike shook his head and sat up, trying to smile.

"Sorry to behave like this," he said. "I feel a bit knocked."

"Damn that girl," said Martin savagely.

"No ; you mustn't curse her. She's perfectly right. She wants her man and she goes about it perfectly directly. Only it's been a bit of a shock to me. Vanity, y'know."

"She'll change her mind."

"She won't. We argued it out last night as soon as I got home, and all over again this morning. No, that's finished. Besides, I don't want her to change her mind. It'd mean another set of scenes : and I can't stand it. I'm through."

Martin noticed his lean wrists were trembling as he held his knees. . . .

"Here we are," said Mike at last. "I'm going to have a good lunch and a bottle of Bollinger. What does our good emblem of the judicature say, old Henry, you remember. 'Who will I share it with ? I won't share it. Just enough to wet my lips.' "

Martin watched his brother absorb two glasses of sherry, a bottle of Bollinger, a large glass of madeira and a double brandy : and at last left him playing a game of snooker with riotous inaccuracy and roars of laughter.

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He warned Mrs. Kiggell of his brother's coming. Mike had not appeared when he got home. He dined alone and waited. At last at one o'clock a taxi stopped outside. He ran down and found his brother, white-faced and incapable in the arms of a large cabby. Together they supported him into the house and laid him on his bed.

"Picked 'im up at 'Yde Park Corner," explained the driver. "'E wasn't ser bad then, gaive me an address in Cheyne Walk, but w'en I stops there, 'e was all crumpled up inside. 'Drive on, Charon,' 'e says, 'that's where my long lorst love is sleepin'," and w'en I asks where to, 'e says, 'Oh, drive to 'ell.' Well, that not bein' a destination within the radius, I argues a bit and at last 'e gives me this 'ouse. Thank *you*, sir, thank yer very much. Drive 'im any night on those terms."

Michael was still asleep when Martin looked in next morning: and a scene similar to that of the previous night took place at midnight, and the next night and the next. Martin never saw Michael except when he was drunk or asleep. Calling in at the club on the fifth day, he was taken aside by an elderly member, who asked what the devil had taken his brother.

"Why?" asked Martin defensively.

"He's been in here every evening since he came back. He's tight by dinner time. He drinks like a fish after dinner. He plays bridge appallingly badly until midnight, and snaps the head off anyone who remonstrates. Half the card-room say he ought to be reported to the Committee and the other half seem to think it's only a question of days before he

shoots himself or chucks himself over Waterloo Bridge."

"Not over—off," said Martin soothingly in a revue joke of the moment. "Leave him to me, will you? I think I can manage him."

He went upstairs and found Michael sleeping in front of the fire. Mike's face was very white; even in a few days the lines had cut deeper into the cheeks. Martin roused him gently.

"I wish you'd dine with me to-night," he said, when his brother was awake. "I want you."

"All right," yawned Mike. "Glad to hear anyone wants me nowadays. Have a drink?"

They ate at a small chop-house, Michael reviling the alleged burgundy he had ordered and venting his spleen on the world. He damned Martin once for jogging the table and then groaned, "I'm sorry, I don't know what's the matter with me. Liver out of order, I suppose."

"Not surprised, with the amount you drink," grunted Martin.

"I know, but what else is there to do? I've got no work. I sit in chambers all day, grinning and groaning and biting my nails over another man's briefs, but it don't help me any. What's there for me to do? There's no work at the Bar, and I must get my teeth into something or I shall scream. That's why I drink. I've half a mind. . . . Look here, do you think Ambrose'd find me something to do?"

"Surely."

"I'll go and see the old twist to-morrow—no, to-night. Here, waiter, tell 'em to get me a

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taxi—quick. Thanks for the meal, I'll see you later."

When he returned, he was elated. Ambrose had offered to sweat him from morning to night and that was all he wanted.

"Cynthia Revel—May go to the devil—And Tony Lumpkin—Is his own man again."

CHAPTER XII

FUNNY business, ain't it?" remarked Michael to Martin one evening. "So far as I can see we simply exist to be shot at all round. Author wants to know why his shoddy book isn't advertised more. Bookseller says he won't sell our shoddy books. Reviewer wants to know why we published it. And we try to be polite to all of 'em. . . . I'm afraid I rather upset Sybil the other day. One of the pompous editors of thick magazines asked for a book to review. So I just sent him on a postcard one of Martial's epigrams—you remember, the lines to Tucca, the chap who only wanted the books to sell, not to read. Chap got on the 'phone to Sybil—it seems he was one of her pets. Of course it took him about an hour to explain the point, but after that we all had a high old session. They rubbed my nose into it so consistently that I had to go and cry on Deb's shoulder (It's a nice shoulder to cry on, Martin). That's the worst of commercial people. They're as solemn as onions over their business, and think you've committed sacrilege if you have a little bit of fun."

"Friend Sharlow drifted into the office this morning," Mike went on casually. "He tried to pull the comrade-in-arms stuff on me, and asked me for an introduction to Ambrose—felt sure we

should want a bright and experienced man to help us."

"Where's he living?"

"Our conversation didn't reach that intimacy. I gathered he'd come into his war gratuity and was spending it in princely fashion. Asked me to dine with him next week. Any use to you? Shall I?"

He cocked a reflective eye across the table at his brother. "Any use to you and Deborah?" he amended.

Martin shifted uneasily. "What do you mean?" he parried.

Mike jerked a shoulder and smiled. "The case is perfectly obvious, brother Martin. There's no need for me to recapitulate the evidence. Only . . . why doesn't Deb divorce her husband? There's plenty of witnesses 'ud be only too glad to testify. I picked him up once myself, blind drunk, being piloted out of a bordel in St. Omer, and there was a little wench down at Arques he was always mucking about with. I know that, oh, and several more. . . . Lots of evidence if you want it."

Martin shook his head. "Deb won't divorce him, unless he asks her to. She says the whole thing's too sordid. And Sharlow doesn't want a divorce. He's far too happy as a protected married man."

"And you?"

"I wouldn't—couldn't—force Deb against her will."

"In spite of wanting her. You do, don't you?"

Martin nodded. He did not trust himself to be able to elaborate the assent, let alone the fact that

he did not want to trust his privy emotions even to Michael.

“And she you?”

Martin half resenting his brother's intimate examination, hunched himself back in his chair and frowned.

“I believe so,” he forced himself to say. “But why discuss it? It's not the least use or help. It'll come to nothing.”

“So you try to kid yourself,” answered Mike rudely. “It's as plain as the nose on your face that you're both in love, and these Tristram affairs always end the same way. You'll both break down, and Master Sharlow will make you wish you'd shed him when you could. I don't see him wasting his opportunities.”

Martin shook his head, but though the conversation changed he pondered Michael's warnings at the back of his mind.

Brian Sharlow arrived in London unobtrusively. He refrained from announcing his presence to his wife for a week after his demobilization. To acquaintances who crossed his path, he would allow that he was looking round, but this circumspection, it seemed, he pursued chiefly in bars and brasseries. With £200 of good government gratuity in his pocket, he felt able to afford himself a deserved rest. For the present, he had not troubled himself to see Deborah. There was time enough for that later, when he would expect her and her cousins to find him what he would describe as a “cushy job.” The early excitement of the possession of his wife had staled by now, even though eighteen

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months had lapsed since he had seen her. If he had taxed himself with it, he might have admitted that less subtle charms appealed to him more deeply : for Deborah, in the face of five years, still retained the candid innocence of expression of nineteen. His real grudge against her was that her father had died a moderately poor man. It had never occurred to him that a successful K.C., could be anything but a wealthy man, and the failure of his anticipations to become reality drove him to an unconscious resentment against what he considered the cause of his lack of money.

On the day he had seen Michael, he had visited Deborah's room at the office. He found her cramped over a vast lay-out, hot, inky, but working with concentration and self-sufficiency. He sensed immediately her lack of interest in him ; neither good nor ill will were apparent in her casual greeting. "Hello, Brian," was all she said. "Sit down and wait a minute while I finish off this. You can smoke if you want to." He sat down and watched her while she puzzled out a problem of space and copy. He felt a little aggrieved at her cool greeting of him. Surely this was not the way to receive the returned warrior ? Or a husband whom you have not seen for eighteen months ? In addition, her obvious capacity and settled air irritated him ; that she was carrying on a job without his assistance, and was not dependent on her husband outraged his conventions of matrimony. He smoked and regarded her covertly with hostile eyes.

Deborah had a very good idea of what was going on in her husband's mind. She had made the delay

in talking to him with the deliberate purpose of finding out. The long absence from each other—to all intents nearly three years—had given her an opportunity of studying first him, and secondly herself. Three years of fending for herself had added experience to native wit. Brought up in a household that paid knee service to a moral outlook unchanged in seventy years, a morality drummed into each succeeding generation, uncontested until it had lapsed to a convention, she found, along with millions of others, that, all unknown to its ancient worshippers, its foundations had perished. Of these millions, some from laziness had continued to believe in the permanence of the structure; some had cried, "all is lost," and behaved like damned souls, but some had struggled to salve what had not rotted and to build for themselves a cleaner, airier structure. Brian, she knew, was lazy and would prefer the first category—at least for his wife. He would now expect her to rejoin him and mould her life to his existence. And what life would it be? Wasting, feckless, impenetrable, he would exist, mentally and spiritually, from hand to mouth, learning nothing, even retrogressive, a disciple of the creed—"To-day, be thou my life"—and he would expect her to submit to his guidance. As she knew him, he was not to be roused; there was nothing in him to be awakened. Better then to cut clear here and now, whatever the future might hold. In this decision, she offered no excuses to herself, no extenuation. An older generation would have considered the implications of that so often misapplied word, duty; a younger believes that duty

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to one's neighbour cannot be applied before duty to oneself is accorded. So, when she was ready, she looked up, propping her chin on her hands and examining her visitor.

"Well?" he asked, impatient beneath her scrutiny.

"You haven't changed as much as I expected, Brian," she observed slowly. "When were you demobilized?"

"Last week . . . I didn't know where you were. I called here on the off chance. . . . You look well."

"I'm very well. The work suits me."

"'Little to do and plenty to get,' as the judge said when he ordered the soldier fifty lashes, eh?" he quoted. "D'you think they'd find me a job here?"

The suggestion took her by surprise. She exclaimed:

"You! They'd never . . ." and checked herself; but he, pleased to see how his remark disconcerted her, went on triumphantly:

"Oh, wouldn't they? I've just got a letter of introduction out of young Michael to his brother."

She did not reply at once, her mind beset with the new problem. He scented her embarrassment and asked brusquely—

"Why shouldn't they help me? I'm your husband."

"Oh, yes," she admitted.

"What's the matter then? You don't want me here? Is that it?"

"No," she replied definitely, facing him, "I don't."

"Why not? I shan't interfere with you."

"No? . . . Oh, it's no good, Brian, you'd never stick it. They work here." In the middle of her speech, a revulsion swept over her; she chid herself hotly for combating Brian's plans. What right had she to dictate what he should do? If Ambrose gave him a post, let him have it; so she finished, "I'm sorry. I'm wrong. Take whatever Ambrose offers you. I'm sure you'll do well."

He saw that he had won in this skirmish, and disposed himself to take advantage of her weakening.

"So that's that. Now what about a flat?"

Once more Deborah hesitated; but, if she was to win, there could be no shirking the issue now. She took a deep breath, and said quietly:

"I'm not going to live with you again, Brian."

"Ah," he sneered. "Now I see why you don't want me in the office. Why won't you live with me?"

"Because . . . Oh, because we're different. You know as well as I do, Brian, that there's nothing between us but an abyss. Your ways are different from mine, your friends, your habits, your mind, your code. I didn't know it when I married you—but I do now."

"In short, you don't like me any more?"

"Oh . . . if you will," she shrugged, mortally weary of wrangling.

"I suppose you've another fellow round the corner."

"How can you!" she flashed. In the excite-

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ment of her anger, she had completely forgotten Martin. "You, of all people."

He almost whistled with surprise at her remark. So somebody had been carrying tales of his amusements. Probably one of those damned puppies, Michael or Martin. He retreated.

"There, there. I'm sorry, Deborah. . . . It slipped out in a moment of temper. . . . You've upset me with these damned notions of yours."

There was silence for a few minutes. Then, Deborah looked up and said coldly :

"I think you'd better go away, Brian."

"But I can't go like this," he returned. "Do you mean that you're turning me down for good?"

She nodded.

"Oh, but you can't," he cried, "you can't send me away like this. I know I'm no good to you," he began to plead, "I'm a rotter and all that. I know I'm not fit to touch you. But do give me a chance. I swear I'll behave. I . . . I'll do anything you like . . . I'm down and out, and you won't let me go under. It isn't like you."

He stammered out sentence after sentence in this scrambling fashion, while the girl sat rigid faced at her desk, not looking at him. He abused himself, he confessed to women, one, two and three, Arques, St. Omer, Paris, but it was all over ; he swore it was ; he wanted nothing but her past kindness, her affection, if she would give it. At last, he worked himself up to such a state of emotion that he began to shed tears. She noticed it ; and that frightened her more than anything else. The emotional strain of this broken speech was sapping

the strength from her body, but she clung tenaciously to her one thought, to rid herself of his presence. At last wearily she pushed back the blotter on her desk and said :

"It's no good, Brian. I'm sorry. It's not what you've done that injures me. It's what you are. I expect it's my fault. I oughtn't to have married you . . . but I didn't know. I didn't know." Her voice almost wailed the phrase as a plea.

Sharlow looked up. He knew at last that he had lost all hold on Deborah. He pulled himself together, and tried to put on an air of bravado.

"If you chuck me out then, I'll just go . . . I shan't use my letter of introduction to your cousin."

"I'll see that you're offered a job here, Brian. I'll clear out myself."

"Oh, quixotic now, I perceive." He grinned ironically. "Don't want me near you though, do you? Well—good-bye."

"Good-bye," she breathed. As soon as the door was closed, she leant forward on the desk and gave rein to her pent-up emotions. Her brain whirled under conflicting ideas. Was she, after all, being just to Brian? Or was she merely casting him aside, as Aurea had thrown away Michael? Might she not be merely trying to justify herself to herself? That last suggestion, that she should see that he found employment, might it not be only a self-tricking to try to kill the thought of injustice. The way he had cried had broken her up: she felt it was unfair, an attempted appeal to her emotions: and it had too nearly succeeded. She felt spent, aban-

doned to the sport of the thoughts chasing hotly through her mind. She pressed her hands to her aching head, and so Michael found her a few minutes later.

"Just my luck," he groaned. "I come here to burst into tears in peace, and find you already flooding." He slid an arm round her shoulders. "Tell uncle all about it. I suppose you've had that husband of yours in here?"

Deborah smiled at him woefully. "I've had half an hour of Brian. But I'm not crying," she added defiantly. She sketched her recent interview for him. At the end he nodded slowly. "Nasty bit of work, isn't he? Look here, why don't you divorce him? You could, you know."

She shook her head resolutely.

"No. I couldn't do that. I'm in a way responsible for Brian. It's as much my fault as his. Of course, we oughtn't to have married, but that was my mistake. Only I can't live with him again."

"As a fact, it's probably my fault, really—or Aurea's." He uttered his wife's name with reluctance. "That doesn't matter now. I tell you if you don't divorce Brian, you'll get into water deeper than you can swim in. (Don't look at me like that, you know perfectly well what I mean.) And I wouldn't put it past Sharlow to hit you—both—as hard as he can. He owes Martin something on his own account, though Martin pulled him out of a very muddy hole. It'll be better for all of you to cut him out now."

She shook her head stubbornly.

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"Well, you've been warned. And now you say you've promised to find him a job with us?"

"Yes. I do owe him that at least, Mike."

"I don't follow your reasoning, but I'll accept your statement. What can he do?"

"I'd give him this job, if you can't find another."

"Curse your young impudence, Deb. Do you think we employ you out of charity? And that your job can be filled by any down-at-heel nondescript? I want you here. Don't you realize that Ambrose is dying? I don't give him more than six months at his present gait. What's going to happen then? D'you think Martin and I can leave it to Sybil to run the show, eh? No, my girl, and you've got to stay here to support the family. Now, what'll we do? I think we'll get Ambrose to give him a job under Halloran at the office we're starting in Manchester, what? That'll stop him snooping round and saying 'Bo' from behind corners. . . . What do you think?"

She agreed hurriedly. She wanted to get Brian out of her mind. Then she said dully:

"I was a prig to think Aurea selfish. I'm just the same myself."

Michael spun on his heel. "No," he said harshly. "Don't get ideas of that kind. You haven't killed anything. Aurea did. Aurea had nothing against me to make her do what she did do. Sharlow never gave you his mind to keep, as I gave Aurea mine. And she nearly killed it the night I came back. Even now I feel maimed. I'll never forgive that—and I never want to hear of her again."

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Deborah was by his side, stroking his arm.
“Poor Mike, did you love her so much?”

“More than I like to contemplate, but I keep it quiet now. The work in this place prevents one thinking, and that’s the best one can hope for. . . . By the way, I’m going to New York next week for a few months. So I’ll miss the opening of Ambrose’s new palace. My hat, what a show it’ll be, with Sybil and all the crowned heads and the simple English gentleman to read the dedication service. . . . Well, Brian goes to Manchester, and don’t you do anything without asking me first. Remember I was once a lawyer—and to keep you out of trouble ’ud puzzle the whole Privy Council.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE formal opening of the Ord Building took place two months after Michael had sailed for New York. Martin regretted his absence: Mike would have enjoyed himself. "'Ere's richness," he murmured to Dan Palliser, as they squeezed their way through the crowd.

The entrance to the Ord Building was cavernous, a vast portal upheld by massy pillars, a vaulting that made one dizzy to gaze into. Beyond it lay nothing less than the courts of Heaven, marble and gold—or rather marble facing and gilt: nine doors of the purest crystal stood round the atrium, behind which lifts fled up and down. Bob-haired angels tripped to and fro with sheaves of papers, suspected of being anthems until perusal discovered them to be programmes. "Where are the harps, Sergeant?" Martin murmured to Kelly, the commissionaire.

"'Arps (Yes, Madame, in the lift, No. 9), beg pard'n, sir, 'arps? Oh, you mean the jazz orchestra. The Ordeans are playin' in the board room on the first floor."

Up in the gallery above the central hall, uncle and nephew surveyed the press below. Palliser was wriggling his shoulders.

"I don't know what the world is coming to," he

lamented, "I used to think I could tell a Davis coat anywhere. I'm not so sure now, I feel positively uncomfortable to-day. Do you mind looking at my back and telling me if the shoulders haven't rucked. No? That at least is gratifying. I couldn't believe this post-war cloth could stand the strain of a crowd. Dear me, what a crowd it is, too. Do you mean to say, my dear boy, that all these people are interested in literature?"

"Well, more or less, I suppose. Some, like me, commercially; some for the pure love of their art."

"All except the politicians, I presume. I can see Hiley Elginbrod down there. He never read anything but a tape machine in his life. And there's Crook, who's running for the Chancellorship, and gets his lucubrations written by a ghost."

"You're a vile old slanderer. He's one of our most prized authors. Ambrose pays him any amount of money."

"Bound to. Crook couldn't afford to take less. Ghosts, except ancestral ones, are costly bed-fellows. Who's that extraordinary figure over against the dais?"

"Editor of *Women and Men*."

"You improve on Browning, I see—but which is that?"

"Man all right, uncle . . . knows his job, too, if he does powder his nose. . . . Here's Ambrose and Robert Carlyon, the man Mike calls 'the simple English gentleman.'"

The crowd below hushed their chattering as the chairman introduced Mr. Robert Carlyon, and the

eminent poet rose to his feet. Mr. Carlyon's features are too well known to require more than the briefest reconsideration. That cleft chin, that sensitive mouth, that upward yearning glance of the mild, light blue eye have been frequently described by interviewers as the mark of the typical English national and in this disguise Mr. Carlyon has lived and, it may be taken, proposes to die. As an active advocate of the preservation of wild birds and the destruction of foreign, particularly Teutonic, nations, he has attracted to himself a vast following. In fact to such an extent has he come to consider himself the protagonist of "old England" that it is said he has refused all honours from the hands of a family as mixed as that of English royalty. To-day, his discourse was of beauty. Perhaps it is only fair to say that he had not been accorded a private view of the new building; which is in the Chicago-Byzantine manner; he had come prepared for something in the style of English Perpendicular. His remarks therefore appeared somewhat inapposite as he referred to the glory of English traditions, keeping his eyes studiously averted from the peach-coloured marble and the gilt. Beauty, he declared, had always been the goal of his countrymen, and beauty alone was worthy of pursuit. The tradition of the Ord firm had been the quest of beauty; and he was proud—yes, proud—to be asked to open this great and noble building—this—ah—Temple of Literature, which set the seal on Sir Ambrose and Lady Ord's great adventure in the cause.

"I admire the simple English taste of your

architecture, Martin," remarked Dan Palliser. "I had the felicity of meeting the designer a few nights ago—over here from Illinois, I was told, to get his portrait painted, and his teeth drawn."

"I've met him," said Martin. "He's rather—overpowering, isn't he?"

"I thought at first he was drunk," returned his uncle, "but judging from the amount he put away during the evening, he must have been dead sober when he arrived, otherwise he couldn't have lasted. It was just what he calls 'pep,' I think. He said he was feeling pretty peppy—a touching phrase. He talked—my word how he talked! He took us—so to speak—all over the thousand and one buildings he has created between San Francisco and Berlin from the coal-hole to the gutters. Then he told us all about his office where, I gather, they supply buildings, in the same way that Woolworths' supplies smaller commodities. He employs three thousand—or was it three million?—draftsmen—the figures were getting so Arabian by midnight that I hesitate to be precise. In the end, someone maliciously introduced him to old Laffan, one of the pillars of English architecture, and your man gets up and says: 'Laffan? Pleased to meet you. I never heard of you.' It's the only time old Laffan was ever taken aback in his life; it almost purified his conversation. . . . Hello, the show's over. What about a drink?"

They found a lift and were brought swiftly up to Ambrose's room on the top floor. A crowd was seething round a buffet, pilgrims battling desperately for manna. They passed Sybil, the inevitable

ade cigarette holder at right-angles to her mouth. 'I am an old-fashioned girl,' they heard her say, as she puffed a cloud of smoke into a journalist's face. "I'll bet you he has that in to-morrow, smoke and all," prophesied Martin. "I wouldn't be interviewed by Dickie Edwards for a fortune."

Ambrose, his face flushed, was standing in a corner listening to Mr. Carlyon discoursing of his family tree. Martin could see the pulses hammering in his brother's temples, and drew Palliser's attention to it.

"Ambrose will be a dead man in six weeks, if he doesn't pull up," said the older man judicially. "No insurance company 'ould take a man with blood pressure like that."

He moved over to the group and taking the famous poet by the elbow: "I haven't seen you for an age, Carlyon. Stands England where it did?" Mr. Carlyon was at the moment expatiating on the patriotism of his maternal great-great-great-great-grandfather at the awkward period of the Great Revolution. Cut short in his history, he gaped twice at his gnarled interlocutor; and, after a few bashful words, sought the more sympathetic audience of two of his female disciples.

"Get hold of Micklejohn," growled Palliser to Martin. "He's here somewhere. And you, Ambrose, come into a quiet room."

Martin found the doctor eating cucumber sandwiches at an enormous pace and talking with equal fluency. Though well over forty, he retained an incredibly boyish appearance and a gusto of life that gave him almost a guarantee of immortality.

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At Martin's summons, he abandoned his amusement, and joined Ambrose and Palliser in the other room.

"You haven't been doing what I told you, old man," he said, after he had made a rapid examination.

"I don't know what you mean," retorted Ambrose savagely. "Damn it, don't I keep your beastly address on a bit of tape inside the collar of my coats."

"Steady on : we're not discussing taxi accidents now. Look here, Ambrose, you've got enough blood pressure to drive a turbine. If you don't take a rest, you'll blow up—go out—phut. Savvy ?"

"But I can't take a rest," groaned Ambrose. "This place'll fall to pieces if I'm not here."

"You won't be here in a month's time if you don't give up now."

At last Ambrose consented, with a very bad grace, to take a holiday, to go abroad and not to communicate with his office for six weeks. He agreed resentfully, and jerked at Micklejohn: "I suppose you'll expect me to pay you for your advice."

"Not I," returned the doctor quickly. "I'm sending the bill to your wife. You understand now—six weeks in Norway, learning to throw a fly and you'll be able to work as hard as ever. It'll teach you something, too, you haven't yet learned."

"What's that ?"

"To be quiet, my boy," and left them.

Ambrose groaned again and turned on the other

two. "It can't be done, I tell you. I must stay. There's a hundred things that want my personal supervision, things I can't explain here."

"Can't Martin take on?" asked Palliser. "Surely a firm like this can run for six weeks on its managers and editors."

"Oh, that side's all right. It's the financial side. . . . Martin doesn't know anything about that, do you?" He glanced sidelong at his brother. "Nor does Sybil. Listen, Palliser, we're much more heavily dipped than you think. I daren't go away yet. . . ." He hesitated; then started to pace to and fro. His forehead was ruggled with the concentration of his thought. Suddenly at the far end of the room, he stopped, swayed and fell forward with a crash. Martin ran to him and turned him over. He looked up at Palliser, who had followed. His uncle shook his head.

"No good. He's dead. Find Micklejohn again and Sybil."

CHAPTER XIV

TEN days later Martin met Michael on the docks at Southampton. Michael had with him a bright-eyed young American whom he introduced as Henry Muir. "Marvellous creature," confided Michael, when Mr. Muir disappeared to retrieve a piece of missing baggage. "Comes of the good old Scots family of Myer. He proposes to re-adopt the patronymic as soon as he settles down. He insists it's so much more respectable."

"I guessed that walk was never learned north of the Border," Martin remarked, "the long dragging stride of the race used to ploughing through the sands of the desert. What have you got him for?"

"I'm thinking of 'verting to Judaism myself. It's the only thing to do nowadays."

"It won't help you, Mike. You can't acquire the tradition."

"No. I'm afraid not. I expect the right Jews 'ould go about saying—'he isn't *quite* one of us—touch of the Christian, y'know.' Quite seriously, they are world conquerors and that's why I've brought our American-Judæan-Gael. You've reserved a carriage? Good. No. Muir won't bother us. There's a restaurant car on the train. He'll never miss a meal."

He made no reference to Ambrose's death until he had disposed of his porters and they were seated. Then—

“This is a pretty kettle of fish,” he said. “Poor old Brose, he never had any other occupation but the firm, and now the incubus has just knocked him out.”

“I told him so a year ago.”

“What did he say?”

“Said he couldn't afford to rest.”

Michael nodded thoughtfully. “He didn't tell you why? No, I don't suppose he would. But I managed to pick up a good deal of unofficial information while I was zooming round in the last months. Did you ever look at our balance sheets for the last three years?”

“Yes. They seemed all right, though we never got much money out of it. Ambrose always had some infernal new scheme which wanted financing.”

“Just so. It wouldn't surprise you then to know exactly how curious those balance sheets were. Don't look so startled. I don't mean the accountants faked them, but all they can do is to work on the figures presented to them. My dear chap, it's too easy. You can make your valuations go up and down like the temperature of a fever patient. And who's going to find out? No one.”

“D'you mean to say Brose . . .”

“Oh, no. Merely took a natural advantage of knowing his own business intimately. After all, he's the only person who could put a correct valuation on certain items.”

“Well, what's the trouble?”

“Ambrose wasn’t a prophet, and he was just a little bit too clever. He thought the 1919 boom was going to continue through 1920. He was due, he could see, to pay on his balance sheet a fabulous figure in E.P.D. So he tried to dodge by putting up this vast building which was dedicated so theatrically to the service of literature last week. Borrowed right and left to do it; and then the slump started as soon as the foundations were laid. He went on kidding himself things were going to come right; and kidding us too, for that matter. But things haven’t pulled round. *Baisse*—baser—bottom; and now he’s died, just when he oughtn’t to, and we’re up to the neck in the mud of our brother’s operations. There’s a whale of a mortgage on the building, and half the departments have a thirty per cent. smaller turnover than a year ago. It’s no good blaming anyone. Ambrose is dead, and we—you, I and Sybil, not that she’s going to count—have got to shoulder the thing somehow. That’s why I’ve brought over Muir. He’s a lawyer, an accountant, an actuary, and a Jew so far’s I’ve been able to trace, but most of all he’s a doctor to tottering institutions like ours.”

“How did you find all this out?”

“I cornered Ambrose one day, as you did, but I persevered until he showed me how things stood.”

Martin gazed thoughtfully at the fields rushing behind them. So, in a way, his father had been justified. Ambrose had built on sand and the sand had shifted. He summoned up the white front of the house in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, his father’s room, and remembered the afternoon when he had given

his word to try to bring the firm back to its old allegiance. He confessed that he had done nothing, had allowed Ambrose to persuade him. Was there to be a chance now to fulfil his engagement? He looked across at his brother hopefully.

“What’s to be done? Retrenchment and reform?”

“I don’t quite think so,” smiled Mike. “Retrenchment and reform are pretty catchwords, but they’re no slogan for people dipped as deep as we are. We’ve got to pull out higher up, or bust.”

Martin reflected for a moment. “How does Sybil stand in all this?” he inquired.

His brother grimaced swiftly. “I don’t know, and what’s more I don’t care, so long as she don’t want Ambrose’s estate in cash. But I don’t think she will. She’s too fond of swanking about as the artistic side of the business—save the mark!—to quit very readily. So long as she stays in, we—you and I—together can stop her having any definite influence. That’s about the only advantage of our father’s will. You and I have got to be as thick as thieves . . . a good deal thicker than brothers.”

He pulled down a bag and extracted some papers. “See here,” he said. Martin looked over his shoulder. “These figures I’ve marked all need checking back—I don’t trust ’em. Here are your preserves, the works. Are these your valuations? They are—and you’re sure of them? Better. They’re about the only figures I’d trust here, except the overdraft and the mortgage.”

Martin was puzzling over the figures—but Mike

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snatched them from him impatiently. "It's not a bit of good worrying your head about it here. We haven't got any true data to go on. Give me a couple of months with Muir and I'll tell you where we're going. . . . Now, tell me how things are with yourself. How's friend Sharlow?"

Sharlow had passed out of Martin's life, he liked to think. In the circulation department of the Manchester office, he was as remote as the Caribbees. His departure, however, had only removed the obliquity of his presence. It had not solved a single factor of Martin's problem. Deborah, too, gave him no help. Since the night she had talked to him at Marlow, no word of love had passed her lips. Not even at the time of Sharlow's appearance had she sought his counsel. She preferred to fight her battles singlehanded.

He accepted her tacit direction, and made no attempt to alter it. And so he tried to imprison in the central keep of his mind the desire for her which had again and again tried to escape. He began to avoid her room in the office, only going to see her when his business was imperative, and then armed with sufficiency of official exposition and expostulation to keep tight fast the rebellious spirit within him. Now that Deborah had found her feet, there were lessening reasons for their meeting, and in fact, since the day of Ambrose's funeral they had scarcely exchanged five words. They had reached a deadlock. All that there was between them was a confession and an admission. They gazed at each other across a barrier they had raised, a barrier which they refused to pull down.

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Would they then call it indestructible, unleapable, and turn their backs on each other? Martin had tried it and by now he knew he had failed—no, not failed; had never had any real intention of turning away. Down in the printing shops, in the seethe and drone of the machines, the clatter and the smells, in the midst of the daily chores, troubles and questions, half his mind clung tenaciously to the image of Deborah on the night she had told him she loved him. And the image seemed to say: “What are you going to do about it?”

A few evenings after Mike's return, he was just preparing to take his hat and go home, when the foreman compositor came into his room with a damp sheet in his hand. It was an urgent proof of an advertisement, which Mrs. Sharlow had sent over two hours ago. It wanted passing for press and there wasn't a boy in the place. Martin took the flimsy and said:

“All right, Foster. I'll take it myself. I'll ring through to tell you if it's O.K.”

He found a taxi and drove to Ords'. The office was closed but a cleaner admitted him. He found Deborah in her room, seated at her desk beneath a hanging lamp, her chin cupped in her hands, her eyes staring intently into the darkness outside the pool of light she sat in. Thinking it was a messenger with the proofs, she relaxed slowly, and, blinking towards the door, disclosed an utter weariness and despair in her attitude and features. When she perceived who the entrant was: “Oh, Martin,” she cried, “what have you come for?” Was it a call of hope, he wondered?

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"Your proof of the *Observer* ad. If you'll O.K. it, I'll 'phone the works and they can get on with the mat."

He sat on the edge of the desk and watched her head, as she raced over the lines: he could only see a tip of nose and a round head of shining hair which waved down over the ears. He wanted to bend forward and take her thin shoulders in his arms.

She finished and waved the proof at him. "You can put your call through from this room," she said. "I had the line put through, as everyone else is gone."

When he had put down the receiver, he asked: "What are you going to do?" She looked at her watch.

"It's after seven. I've missed my train and there's not another till after nine. I shall go to a Lyons and have a poached egg."

"You'd better come and dine with me," he said. "Poached eggs aren't food for a working woman."

"Would you really like me to?" she asked, glancing at him from under her eyelashes. "Wouldn't you much rather go and have fun with men at your club?"

"Not I. The dinner's as worn out as the company. Come on."

It was a May evening. The City traffic had thinned. The pigeons were murmuring and rustling under the pediment of St. Clement Danes. The sky was bright between the ravine walls of the Strand. It had donned its latest frock, a creation of apricot and oyster grey, beneath a veil of russet smoke. As

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they crossed Lincoln's Inn Fields to the uneven patter of tennis balls, Martin pointed to the old office.

"All gone—napoo—fini—caput."

"You take it too hardly," she said.

"Only because we've lost the only important thing, because there's no end and no aim in our present existence. Under my father's rule there were heaps of mistakes and contradictions. There were fantastic schemes that came to nothing, or ruined themselves ; there was spending of money and losing of money : it didn't matter : there was an ideal of scholarship and light, of learning and humanism that gave a reason to us, and an enthusiasm. Now that's dead. We exist simply to grab off all we can, to make money and to make money fast. It doesn't matter what we do. We've no standard, except the test of success. 'Is there any money in it ?' is the first question we ask. If there is none, out it goes. We're no longer taken seriously. There's been a steady descent in our standards. There can be only one end to it. We shall just fizzle out."

"Does it matter ? You're doing good work : you know you are. In fact, it's known that the printing department is the best organized in the group ; and the work's first class."

"It don't amount to a heap of beans : and it's costly. I'll bet you any sum you like to name that this young man, Muir that Mike's imported, will try to cut me down. He's been asking me a lot of cautious questions already. He'll try every possible way to economize if he's allowed full powers. And

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in this case I shall stand out against him till all's blue. I wish I'd a bigger interest. I'm simply powerless unless I get the backing of Mike or Sybil : and I don't believe I'll get either. . . . However, I'll not cry till I'm hurt. Here we are. Let's be festive. You can have anything you like, and I'll have some beer."

While they were waiting, Martin suddenly reached across and pressed one of Deborah's hands.

"I'm a beast to have gone on talking about myself all this time. You've got a far rougher field to harrow than I have."

Deborah smiled at him, a smile half shy, half affectionate.

"I'm not so badly off," she answered. "I'm kept too busy to think much, though sometimes I wish I could settle down. Yes—me. After all I used to say, too. I want a decent life, Martin, instead of all this racketing about to no purpose. I've got less purpose than the firm—no plan—nothing."

"Who's converted you ?"

"Perhaps it was Furnival—Garrett Furnival—you know—our bestest best seller."

"That tripe-hound !"

"Don't sneer. He's a most delightful person. He came in to talk to me about something he wanted used for publicity over his new book. Then just as he was going, he said : 'I suppose you despise all my works and me into the bargain !' Of course, I muttered something foxy and non-committal, but he waved it aside and said : 'Don't hedge ; I understand.' Then he told me that when he was

very young, he set out with the intention of writing the perfect novel, the book every novelist dreams to write, the microcosm of life. Three years went by. He had written four books, all of which had received polite commendation from the critics, but he'd made no money,—two hundred pounds in all. So he concluded that his writing was merely vanity, and he would turn his talents deliberately to making money. He said it was quite easy to write a best seller, a sentimental one, if one could acquire a stomach-ache, and that's perpetual after some years of short commons. It's axiomatic that all best sellers have imperfect livers. 'Now,' he said, 'I have enough money to live decently. I've built my house and made my garden and they're both better things than any novel that's been written in the twentieth century. I know that my house will stand three hundred years ; and that all the rubbish I—or anyone else for that matter—have penned will be dust a century or so before then ! ' "

Martin nodded. "A pretty piece of special pleading—but it only comes to the fact that he hadn't sufficient faith."

"Have you ? "

"I don't know. It hasn't come to the point yet. It's coming, though, coming very soon. I'll try to ride it out."

She thrust out her hands quickly, the palms cupped forward.

"I'd like to help you—not that I can."

He looked across at her eager face. "If I wanted a confederate, I'd choose no one better than you. Half the time I'm afraid that I'm going to make a

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fool of myself for nothing. I'd like you beside me to comfort and strengthen me."

Silence fell between them. It was broken by Deborah, who looked at her watch and cried:

"Heaven's, it's almost nine o'clock. I shall miss my train."

They hastily paid their bill and caught a taxi. Deborah flung herself into a seat and lay back, her eyes fixed forward into the darkness. Martin squeezed himself back in the corner and tried to withstand the emanation of their minds. The air quivered with implication. Half drugged with the desire for each other, their spirits had emerged from their cells and clasped: only their bodies stayed chained, inert, and they exchanged no word.

The taxi tore down the ramp at Paddington. Deborah leapt out as it drew up, and ran. Martin, only delaying to fling some silver at the driver, pursued her. As they reached the barrier, they saw the tail lamp of the guard's van shake and recede.

They halted and laughed. "Three-quarters of an hour to the next," she remarked ruefully. "Be off with you, Martin."

He refused. The chain between them had not snapped. The missing of the train seemed a stroke of fate. He slipped his arm under hers and drew her to a seat.

"I'll wait," he said. Then after a pause. . . . "You did mean what you said just now, dear Deb, about helping. . . . Yes, I knew you did. . . . I wish you'd make it reality. . . . Darling, I love

you." He floundered and glared so ferociously at a fat man who threatened to share their seat, that he hastily turned his back and retreated to the bar. "Damn that horrible fellow," went on Martin, irritably. "Deb, you say you love me. Do come to me. Make a break with the past. There's nothing left in my life now but wanting you and waiting."

Her head was bent forward, but now she turned it to him. One hand caught the lapel of his jacket and drew him towards her. Their lips met blindly.

"I want you," she whispered, nestling against him. "Dear heart, I've been wanting you for years."

"Then ?"

"No, my dear." She shook her head. "I'm not going back on our old compact. We must stay apart. . . . We promised to keep this secret between us. Besides, I won't have you dragged through the courts on my account."

He argued, he pleaded : but she persisted in her attitude.

"Let it be, Martin. We've got to pay for not having known ourselves earlier. . . . Please, Martin."

He abandoned the pursuit sullenly and sat dully staring at the ground. She watched him from the corner of her eye. She wanted this sulky child more than he believed. She wanted to take him in her arms, to feel his arms round her, to feel his hard young body strained to hers, to have his lips on hers, to smell the scent of his body. She crept one hand to his knee.

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“Martin, darling, let’s go away for a few days together. I never see you except in the middle of the office and people and *things*. I’d like you to myself just once. If we’ve got to wait for ever, let’s have just one memory to support us.”

He looked at her, half smiling. It seemed a contradiction of her arguments : but he snatched at it, and agreed.

“How soon ? ” he asked. “Next week ? ”

“Yes, next week,” she said gravely. Then, happily : “Oh, Martin, choose a nice place.”

He handed her gravely into the train. She leant out and touched his cheek with her lips. “Next week,” she repeated. “My dear love.”

One evening in the next week, they lay side by side on soft down turf, looking across a wide valley, seemingly so wide that the horizon melted greyly into the grey-blue sky, and showed nothing but imperceptible gradations of colour in the curve of the bowl. The air was warm and still, so still and warm that even the beech trees flanking the hill no longer feared the wind or shivered. Wild thyme and mint, warmed by the lengthening shadows, spread their perfumes. Everything, save the sun and the rabbits—stern materialists skipping in a chalky warren a hundred feet below—was static.

Deborah and Martin lay here face downwards, looking out into this universe, “silent with swimming sense.” It was their last evening. They had scrambled up the hillside and flung themselves breathless on the earth. At length he rolled over

on his side, and stared unwinking at his companion, as curious as young Adam at young Eve.

What is love ? What were the witches brewing in their philtres to bind soul to soul ? Not—no, never—the foul herbs, the lustful pricklers-on that hang like weeds in alleys and dark ways of cities. What then is love ? To desire, and its complement, to be desired ; to protect and to seek protection ; to possess and to be possessed ; to strike and to be struck ; to give and to surrender ; but so perfect is the harmony, so true the balance, so inevitable the compensation that no engineer, no mathematician, no chemist has ever analysed its tiny scruples ; and it is left to lovers only to stumble on the formula and to cry, wide-eyed at the world's stupidity : " Why, we love."

This was Deborah, whom he had known all his life, and of whom he had been ignorant. Or otherwise, it was a new Deborah, clothed with the unfathomable experiences of her thousand forbears, beautiful with an inherited wisdom, a dowry but just now bestowed. All the virtues were to him mirrored in her face ; beauty, candour, knowledge, justice, comprehension, were gathered in a curve of the lip, the angle of an eyelid, wise serenity in the fall and rise of the breast, courage in the ripple of the hair. And by this unfamiliar Deborah he was enchained so straitly that he must cry at the infinity of pleasure and of pain that she caused.

She must have been touched by his thought, for she slowly turned her head and received his stare. She smiled a reply.

" To-morrow ? " he said.

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"To-morrow . . . the end."

"Or the beginning?"

"No, no. Our promise."

"Made when we didn't know."

"But still a promise."

"We cheat ourselves for what never was."

"We keep it, the payment for these three days."

"Three days in which we have learned a reality."

He broke into hot, breathless pleading, flinging himself beside her and taking her hands. But she waved her hand against the flame of his words, and they died away.

"Dear Martin, oh, my dear love, you mustn't cry. We know everything we need to know now. Our two masks can meet and recognize Martin and Deborah behind. At night in my bed I shall feel the curve of your body and know I'm safe."

He turned away and stumbled to his feet. The sun's rim was hesitating on the tree-tops. He spread his hands, sullenly, in a gesture of defeat and his long shadow echoed it grotesquely.

"The sun's going down," he said dully. "Come along."

She rose: then with a sudden impulse, knelt again and stroked the tiny flowers. "Oh, beautiful earth," she prayed, "who keeps these little plants so that they return again, keep at least the spirit of two lost wanderers so that they may rest together."

England asleep. A steady moon and a light mist. An owl cries in the distance and in the water meadows a nightjar calls his grumpy note. The

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brook runs, busy and brisk, beneath the little stone bridges that face the inn where Deborah and Martin lie sleeping. They lie clipped fast to each other, twined and mingled, a brown arm, a white breast, a brown head on a white shoulder; and the shadows of the trees play in the moonlight over the bodies of lover and loved, of loved and lover.

CHAPTER XV

MARTIN was poring over a cost sheet in his office on a broiling July afternoon. An estimate had been returned to him from the head office with a pencilled request from Michael to reduce it. He knew well enough that when submitted, the figures had been reduced to the minimum and that all the careful rechecking that he and the costing clerk were now indulging in was wasted labour. His hand moved wearily to his forehead and his nose wrinkled disgustfully at the smell of oils and ink that rose from the works. The air shook and quivered with the steady beat of the machines. Outside, London stank of London and its citizens.

The shrill peal of the telephone broke like a cool shower of water. He picked up the receiver and heard the girl's voice say: "A Captain Sharlow to see you." Now what. . . ? He became alert, told the girl to show Sharlow up and dismissed the costing clerk.

He did not offer to shake hands when Sharlow lounged into the room, but sat still and waved him to a chair. The light fell full on the face and Martin thought how puffy it had grown since he had last seen it on the Vierstraat road. He noticed too the eyes shot with blood and disliked an aroma of spirits

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expelled through the open pores. Sharlow was taking his time ; he lit a cigarette and sucked down a cloud of smoke, which he exhaled noisily through his teeth. At length he looked across at Martin and remarked sardonically :

“ I know all about you, Mr. Martin Ord.”

Martin smiled across at him. “ Then you know a great deal more than I do, Sharlow,” he said pleasantly. “ You must be a very profound psychologist.”

“ I know enough psychology to settle your hash,” the other replied. “ You and my wife have been making fools of yourselves.”

“ Indeed ? ” Martin smiled again.

“ In deed and in fact. I guessed it a long time ago. So I’ve had a pal keepin’ his eye on you. Yes, my pretty Puritan, I know all about your little holiday in the country and who went with you. And now you’re going to dance a little for me, Mr. Captain Bloody Ord.”

Sharlow was speaking with heavy deliberation, trying to see the face opposite him through the sunlight.

“ Quite the little detective,” said Martin lightly. “ And what exactly are you going to do ? How do you propose to make me dance ? ”

“ There’s such a thing as the divorce court,” Sharlow returned, “ and in spite of these damn fool judges, juries still give damages. I think I’ll be able to skin you all right, my sportsman ; you come in the category of employers tampering with their servants’ wives.”

“ To be sure, you remind me that you’re an

employee and I'm a director. Oblige me by getting out of the room."

"Not quite so fast, young feller. You haven't quite heard all I've got to say. I've still got some pals in Fleet Street: they'll get a pretty bit of copy out of this. I'll make your name, the name you're all so proud of, smell like rotten mud before I've finished with you."

Martin got on his feet. "You don't smell very pleasantly yourself," he said sharply, "and I prefer your room to your presence. But just remember that you're hardly in a position to come into the courts yourself. What's the old quote? 'No unclean hand shall touch the pure fount of justice.' '*Procul, o procul este, profani*,' or, in other words—'Be off, you dirty dog.'"

"You're very high and mighty now," sneered Sharlow. "Just wait until a few pars begin. Neither of you will like it then. My dear little wife won't like my evidence one little bit. Yes—that makes you think a lot. Look here. I won't be hard on you. Give me a couple of thousand and I'll keep my mouth shut. What about it?"

"Get out," said Martin. He had come past his desk and stood over the other man. "Get out quick or you won't have a chance of giving your precious evidence. You'll be the first exhibit in a murder case."

Sharlow rose to his feet and made for the door.

"All the same, my cock, I've got you by the short hairs. Pay up and look pleasant: it'll be better. I'm going back to Manchester by the 4.30 and I'll give you a fortnight to come to your senses.

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Think it over. . . . All right, don't move. I'm going."

The door closed. Martin put his hands in his pockets and whistled through his teeth. A pretty mess they were all in. There was no doubt that Sharlow had a cinch on them. There was nothing to be done except wait. He wondered what Mike would do and decided to consult him before seeing Deborah. He walked over Waterloo Bridge and was shot up in the lift to his brother's office. He heard Mike talking as he entered the room; but his words were cut short by a harsher foreign voice saying :

"But lissen, Mr. Ord, lissen now. I've been studying upon this prahblum and I figure it . . ."

Mike turned as he heard Martin close the door and waited.

Mike raised his eyebrows ironically at his brother's angry face.

"Want to see me? All right, Muir. Come to dinner to-night and we'll talk it over afterwards." The American gathered up his sheets and, bowing to Martin, went into the next room.

Martin hurriedly recited his interview with Sharlow. His brother laughed.

"How like our friend to offer you second rights for a good round sum. Reminds me of 'Nebuchadnezzar, the King of the Jews, sold his wife for a pair of shoes.' You'd have him back on your hands in a year, asking for a pension. Still, we don't want a nasty scandal. I daresay we could keep a lot of it quiet, but I doubt the reckless fertility of Brian's imagination. He'd make up

too good a story to be lost to some of the Sunday papers."

Martin stood in the window. From here he could see the Embankment and a tug fussing up the river with barges in tow, a duck with its train of ducklings.

"One thing," he said sharply, "I won't pay Sharlow to keep his mouth shut and I won't stand for his opening his mouth about Deborah."

"Two opposed propositions. There's one consolation—that you and Deb can break away. Let's talk to her." He telephoned through to her. She came, bright and youthful, thinking it was some query in affairs. She smiled and flushed a little when she saw Martin: but her colour deepened when they laid the story before her. She pondered the morass waiting for them, for some minutes.

"I'll see Brian myself," at last she said smiling.

"No you won't," interrupted Martin gruffly. "I'll wring the brute's neck first."

"Don't be an ass," remarked his brother cheerfully. "I've told you before we can't have a hanging in the family. Go on, Deb."

"Neither of you understands him," she continued. "He's a mass of contradictory qualities, and they all lie in layers, never mix. If I can get one of the good streaks on top, he'll be perfectly reasonable."

"I think I'll have a word with him, too," added Michael thoughtfully. "It's wonderful what tact I have when I really try. I'll write to him to come up next week: and in the meantime, you, Martin, you hold your tongue."

Martin followed Deborah to her room. He sat

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down on the edge of her desk and discontentedly swung his foot.

"I don't want you to see Sharlow," he said. "I'd rather pay him. I suppose I can raise the money."

She shook her head and smiled at him. "You can leave it to me," she answered. "I'll find a way to prevent his talking too much. How long does a divorce take, Martin?"

"Years and years, I believe; well, say, ten or twelve months."

"Oh," she exclaimed in dismay, "we can't wait all that time." She perched herself on the desk beside him.

"Well?" he asked, smiling.

"Well?" she asked in return. "Oh, Martin, let's run away together. You're you and I'm I and we're us—we I mean."

"You ought to have said so months ago," he replied, and kissed her.

Sharlow arrived in London, swelling with satisfaction at his ingenuity and cleverness, not to be browbeaten out of his triumph. Already he had persuaded himself of the justice of his cause. He dwelled on it to himself as he went to and fro, reciting beneath his breath what he considered would be a particularly telling phrase in his testimony. To the muddier passages of his own past, he paid no attention, or, if he did, he was able to justify them by later facts. In the mood of Calvin, when he burned Servetus, he felt uplifted by a desire to punish, the ingredients of which he did not pause to examine.

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In this cock-a-hoop mood he was shown into Michael's room. Expecting to be attacked, he was taken aback by the geniality of Mike's address and by the offer of a cigar. After a few commonplaces, he began assertively :

"I suppose you've asked me to talk about your brother and my wife. I'll tell you here and now, I've made my plans and I'm sticking to them."

"Quite so, quite so, my dear fellow," returned the other. "But forgive my asking—I don't take your point of view in making all this stir. You see it makes it extremely awkward for me. I can't possibly keep you on in the firm if you go about branding my name (it is my name too, you know) ; it'd look so bad. Besides, why make such a fuss ? You won't make anything out of it."

"Oh, won't I ?"

"Not a penny, my dear chap. The value of wives has decreased to a positively scandalous degree in the last twenty years. In fact, juries are coming to consider them a liability. And moreover, with your record . . ."

"What about my record ?" interrupted Sharlow.

"It isn't spotless, if you dwell on it. Of course you know it more intimately than I do, but there are one or two grease marks that I can see. It'll mean a peck of trouble and a deal of expense. After all, as men of the world" (Mike liked that phrase ; he had caught it from Palliser) "as men of the world, we don't go bustling about, crying our wrongs to the sky." He paused and watched his *vis-à-vis*. The man of the world thrust had found its mark. Sharlow had drawn himself up

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and was nodding majestically. Mike resumed his discourse.

"You see, I'm in the same boat as yourself. I'm only waiting for my wife to ask me to start proceedings, but I'm not going to amuse the world by proclaiming my absurdity in public."

"There's something in what you say," admitted Sharlow. "Still. . . ."

"Then that's all right," said Mike, slamming open a drawer and hunting in it. "Look here," he went on drawing a cheque book out, "are you hard up? Of course you are. Here's a cheque for a hundred, and I'll let you have another when the divorce is through. Agreed? But not a word about it outside this room. Now go along and tell Deborah it's all right."

Sharlow took the cheque, gazed at it stupidly. Then he grinned to himself.

"Well, I don't mind obliging you," he said airily. "Thanks for the cheque. I'll remember to remind you of the next one. Good-bye."

"Phew! what a piece," thought Michael. "I wonder whether that's champerty and maintenance, or blackmail. Anyhow, young Martin shall find the money, when it's all over."

The new found man of the world strode along the corridor to Deborah's room. He felt magnanimous. The cheque had salved the jealous spot in his mind, had cooled the urgency to punish that had been driving him. Nevertheless, he could not resist the temptation to vaunt his victory over her—"twist her tail a little," as he entered her room.

"Well, my girl," he grinned, standing over her

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desk, "perhaps you'll admit that I've got the better of you after all."

"I wonder," thought Deborah: but she didn't say it. Instead she asked thoughtfully: "Why do you want to hurt me so much, Brian?"

For the moment he was nonplussed. "Hurt you? I don't want to hurt you. You've been caught out . . . and you've got to take your medicine. That's all."

"I didn't try to punish you."

"The more fool you, that's all. If you don't learn to play the rules of life, you'll get bitten, as you're going to be bitten now."

"I don't understand why you want to 'bite,' as you put it. You know your audience won't think any the better of you."

"Perhaps not, but I don't mind. They'll throw more mud at you. I've never pretended to be anything but what I am, an ordinary man with an ordinary man's wants. But you're one of these sensitive little save-your-face humbugs, that pretends to believe in moral conventions. . . . If you were a real sport, you'd give me a kiss." He slipped an arm round her shoulders; but the girl tore herself free and blazed "Brian!" at him so fiercely that he stopped his pursuit. The indignation in her flushed face and furious eyes swept over him and daunted him.

"All right—all right," he grumbled. "Don't get excited. I'm not going to run after you. And as a matter of fact, I only came in here to tell you that I've changed my mind. You can have your divorce as quietly as you like and I'll say nothing

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more than my part. Fact is, I'm not a bad chap if I'm treated properly."

Deborah, still breathless with the flurry of the scramble out of his clutch, sank into her chair in wild amazement at this sudden conversion.

"That's . . . that's awf'ly decent of you, Brian," was all she was able to stammer. "Frightfully kind, really. . . . Thank you. . . ." Words failed her, but they were unnecessary. Sharlow had picked up his hat.

"Well, ta-ta, Deborah. You needn't worry. . . . No, don't thank me" (he could not resist a final flick). "I'm doing it for the only member of the family I respect . . . and that's not you or your puppy. Good-bye."

As the door closed, Deborah flung her arms forward on the desk, and her head upon them. She wanted to cry or to laugh ; she did not know which. Perhaps, more urgently, to laugh light-headedly at this grotesque release from imprisonment. Already the clouds which had lowered so long above her head, were sweeping away beyond the horizon. How dark those years had been, she had only now the courage to confess. The shock of marriage, the discovery of her partner, her revulsion, his assaults ; cruel, vivid recollections of nights in sordid lodgings, trembling flesh and brutal body—t'schah : she rolled her handkerchief tightly between her fingers and scrubbed her palm. And always in the background lay the impossibility of evasion, tied by an ever-lengthening rope of debt. Last, the growth of her love for Martin, too late. She had tried,—she knew she had tried—to play fairly by her husband :

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but from him she had had no help. Yet in a way she was thankful to him for giving her this narrow passage to escape. She leaned back and let her mind drift forward towards the future, aimlessly and happily as a leaf upon the water.

CHAPTER XVI

DEBORAH found her mother unexpectedly sympathetic, when she broke to her the news of the impending divorce. "I'm afraid I've been praying for it for a long time," Fanny Dare calmly replied: and then broke into what was almost a chuckle, "I didn't think Martin had it in him. I suppose it was you, bad daughter." She kissed Deborah.

"I suppose I ought to feel horribly ashamed about it," her daughter remarked, looking thoughtfully into the fire. "I ought to slink about and hurry down side streets when I meet people I know. I don't. I feel perfectly happy and not in the least like the woman taken in adultery. Should I, Mother?"

"Don't use that horrid word, adultery, in my hearing," shivered her mother. "It implies everything unpleasant to me, an unpleasant promiscuity, like rabbits and monkeys. Ugh! To me it means light living, like sleeping four in a bed. No. You don't live loosely, child, nor does your lover—at least I don't think so. That's why you have my blessing."

Martin had more trouble in explaining matters to Dan Palliser. "Of course," said the old gentleman, "you young men have your peculiar code. In my

young days, you'd have had to resign your club, a terrible penalty for a gregarious man like myself, and you might have had to go abroad for a bit. Nowadays, you turn up with a new wife every week and nobody even notices it. It's sapping, my dear boy. Still, I suppose it's all right, if Fanny approves. I'll do my best for you." He left, shaking his head, and became very caustic to the steward of the club where he dined that evening, over the proper method of stewing prunes.

Deborah and Martin installed themselves in a tiny flat looking down upon the Zoo; "exceptional position for martyrdom," said Martin, hearing the lions roar. The rooms lay high and the hill below appeared to run straight into the sky like a wall from which sprouted pollarded trees, planted at such accurate intervals that they might be nine-pins arranged for the sport of Olympians.

They arrived in the lazy glow of an August evening. Martin spent an hour sorting a wild jumble of clothes that went back to his earliest school-days. A heap of old socks and stockings and shirts, oddments, and net-like relics were consigned to a corner. He gave it up and sought solace in the bath. Deborah, undressing, could hear him harshly crooning an ancient war song against the fall of water. She sat down on the end of the bed at the window. She could just distinguish a garden down below, a rich affair of flagstones, rock and water plants and sunk ponds. From above in the darkness, it resembled the streets and waterways of some city in miniature, a Dutch or Scandinavian landscape. It had the peaceful air of a place set apart,

as secret as her heart. She dwelt over it, loving it. Martin, coming in, knelt behind her. She motioned towards the little garden : and he, looking over her shoulder, saw with her eyes.

"Content ?" he asked, his arms round her thin body.

"Utterly contented, my dear love," she murmured, turning her face to his shoulder.

A month and more passed in tranquillity. They passed to and fro to their offices, happy in their certainty. Only the ominous ubiquity of Muir irked Martin, though he found himself liking his quiet and tactful pertinacity. Two or three times, he invaded Martin's office and spent an hour or so questioning and debating. A fund of pertinent illustrations to sharpen his points conveyed in the racy, vivid idioms of the New World, half industrial, half Jacobean, illuminated his talk.

"No, sir, I'm not like these publicity kings that go back to New York saying they reckon the old British lion's sick and dying : they're plain boobs, just know nawthing. They think becaze they can't sell their goods here, that this country's lazy. But I've studied up on history and I know what's the matter with you. Before the war you had enormous faith in yourselves. You only won the war by the skin of your teeth, and you've gotten doubts. Now in America, we hadn't any faith : but we've gotten it now. We believe in everything : yes, sir, in everything from Calvin Coolidge to the advertisements in the *Saturday Evening Post*, from the forecasts in the financial noospapers right down to the Eighteenth Amendment—for the other man, naturally.

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Even that fool title—‘Have faith in Massachusetts’ which is clean contrary to every other state in the Union’s experience, was lapped up like a mislaid bottle of Kentucky rye. That’s what done it. Faith.”

“Suppose your idol’s feet are clay?” asked Martin, amused.

“Get ’um a noo pair of gums to stahp ’em melting. See here, Mr. Martin, your brother and you and Lady Ord have got a nice little business here. You’re all afraid it’s going to smash up. What you wahnt is faith. Faith and ready money—but chiefly faith. You wahnt to make your employees have faith, have belief in the firm. Your motto ought to be ‘Service.’ That’s a fine slogan, now. Makes ’em all peppy. There’s many a fortune been made in the U-nited States out of that simple, old-fashioned slogan ‘Service.’ You may laff. I’m not a religious man, but I’m a profound behaviourist. Say, lissen, I’m haff financier and haff doctor, and the doctor’s the bigger haff. I’m ’tending to your brother now; he’s a good boy, and he’ll be a lovely man when I’ve finished with him.”

“What’s the medicine?”

“Just faith—faith and ready money. I can’t spill the dope yet. In a week’s time, we’ll all be sitting round shaking hands with one another.”

“If you’re going back to the office, I’ll come with you.”

“Surely—Fine. I’ve a taxi waiting.”

In the cab, Muir returned to his theme.

“Dj’e ever hear of ole man Gaston—he’s alienated now, but he was the finest press agent in two

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continents. He found himself in Denver one time, bust—five dollars and an empty suit-case. Dj'e think he was finished? Not he. He bought a dollar Waterbury and paid a deposit on a cheap safe. Then he hired a room, and advertised himself as Professor Gaston and was prepared to read folks' sway. What's sway? I don't know and nor did the professor, but he hung the Waterbury inside the door of the safe, where it could be heard ticking, put the patient's head against the door, then wrote him out a chart bung full of Egyptian mystery, hieroglyphics, and footnotes and pushed him out to get ready for the next. He cleared twenty-five dollars the first day, fifty-six the second, and a hundred and thirty the next. Then he quit. That was faith, faith on his side in the credibility of human beings, faith on theirs in something they couldn't understand. That's faith." The taxi drew up. He beamed on Martin, and, calling "Wait," to the driver, passed into the Ord building.

Martin sought his brother's room. It had not been finished when Ambrose died, but now it had all the augustness of the closet of modern industry, thick carpet, concealed lights, several telephones, two large desks, a plutocratic couch and arm-chairs. A large electric fire swirled fictitious flames in a shelfless cavity. On the walls had been hung portraits of the Ord dynasty. Not Robert Ord I: he had had no time for such vanities, but Robert II, a plump child in a shovel hat, embracing a wooden-looking spaniel, alleged to be painted by Sir Joshua, but almost blatantly the work of Susan Reynolds.

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Next, Lawrence's picture of the severe Matthew, in spectacles, stock, and tight-buttoned surtout, outshone his brothers', who had reluctantly agreed to be painted, but had compromised on the obscure and presumably cheaper, Fraser. Then Martin's father, Robert III, a bold majestic figure, fierce in its redness of hair and complexion, but softened by the humour round the eyes. It had been painted *con amore* by an artist, a friend, long dead, and Robert Ord stood there leaning backward, a vital figure against shelves of worn leather volumes. Last in the row, Ambrose, a vanity of Sybil's on the occasion of his knighthood. Orpen had done it and had caught, almost caricatured, the imprisoned spirit, whirling itself to death with the persistence of a caged squirrel on the treadmill.

"There'll be room for you and me," Michael remarked. "You'd better get someone to do you as a still life, old Ironside. . . . Phew! what an afternoon. Sybil's attending a committee and I've had two of her pet authoresses in here. When you were in the office, was it the usual thing for authors to pour out the dull details of their domestic life without provocation? The first one hates her husband in the dining-room, but loves him in his bath. The other despises hers because the poor boob brokes stock. And the way they gesticulate, do up their faces, spill powder and cigarette ash all over the carpet! I'd rather keep wild cats any day of the week; they smell less noxious."

"I've had an afternoon with Muir," threw in

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Martin abruptly. "What's all this stuff he's talking about faith and ready money? What are you hatching?"

"Dear old Myer, dear old Muir," yawned Michael, stretching his arms. "'S walking about bung full of mystery, making playful gestures and pretending to blow pep into me."

"Are you getting fresh money into the firm?"

"Well, we hope to. When Muir's worked the oracle to his satisfaction, he'll let us know. In the meantime, I'm praying that he's going to propound a possible scheme. He frightens me to death with his way of popping questions at me."

"Who's the money to come from?"

"The public, sir; the blessed, blessed public."

Martin was thunderstruck.

"What! Nonsense! You'll never get an issue underwritten."

"Won't we? Well, I dare say not. Anyhow, leave it to Muir. If anybody can do it, that honest man will."

His brother's proposition had half stunned Martin. He stood and gaped. Ords' a public company. It was a lunatic's dream.

"I . . . I . . ." he began. Then he turned to go.

"Here! . . . Hi! I say, don't go," exclaimed Michael. "I want you, Martin." He shifted uneasily in his chair. "I've got an important interview due in about ten minutes and I'd like you to sit in on it, if you will. You came in to the first part. You may as well see the finale."

Martin looked at his brother's face. The colour

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had deepened and his jaw began to urge itself forward.

“Who with ?” He guessed. “Aurea ?”

Michael nodded. “Read this,” he said grimly, throwing a letter across the table. It was from Aurea and stated in no uncertain terms that she was preparing to return to her husband.

“And I won’t have her back. Not on any terms. That’s final.”

Martin nodded. He understood what lay behind his brother’s remark. Almost at once the telephone bell buzzed. “Show her up,” said Michael briefly. The lines in his face deepened. His body drooped.

He rose as the door opened. For one pulse of time, Aurea stood framed, swaying slightly, an uncertain smile on her lips ; and Martin was suddenly swept back to the platform at Oxford ten years before, when she had stood looking at his brother in just that poise : but this time, no one hurried forward to assist her. Michael bowed coldly, and by a gesture invited her to a chair. He himself remained standing, while Martin withdrew to the shadow of a bookcase. The silence for the moment baffled her ; then she asked half timidly :

“You got my letter, Michael ? You understand, don’t you ?”

“I understand you want to come back. Is—er—Mr. Ferrars not satisfactory ?”

“He doesn’t want to marry me—that’s all.”

“You’ve been living with him ?”

“No, oh no. Didn’t you know ? I’m still at the flat.”

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"I'm afraid I never troubled to inquire. So Ferrars isn't prepared to stand the racket, is that it?"

"Yes," she admitted ruefully. "He knows it would ruin his career."

"And so you've thrown him up, and want to come back to me. It won't do, Aurea, it won't do. I'm not going to have you."

"Oh," she said indignantly, "you suspect me."

"Not in the least. I'm quite ready to believe you. I do. I don't want to see you again, that's all."

"But, Michael," she cried, "I love you. I've loved you all along. I know I've been a fool. I've been reproaching myself ever since I sent you away. And you—you love me still, don't you?" She stretched out her hands, pleading with them and with her eyes, in which tears gathered. Michael looked at her coldly.

"Not in the least, Aurea. I gave that up long ago."

"You must."

"Listen to me a moment. Ages ago you had a very faithful and devout young lover, who prized you above everything he held dear in the world. You killed him, finished him off, just with a chip-chop of your fingers. He's dead, d'you see, quite dead. You're talking to-day to another man, who isn't interested in you and isn't attracted by your looks."

She ran her eyes over him, bewildered. A wave of comprehension broke over her face.

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"You've got somebody else. You're in love with another woman," she flung at him. Michael laughed harshly.

"You can set your mind at rest. There's nobody else. There never was anybody but you, but you don't exist any longer."

"So you're throwing me away. Can you?"

She rose from her chair and stood to her full height, looking Michael directly in the face. The light fell on her face and her body, a creature of infinite beauty and grace. Her eyes sought his, ironically challenging; her lips parted, inviting. Michael did not move, nor shift his gaze from hers. Eyes met eyes in deep concentration. Aurea's fell.

"I've said all I have to say," said Michael grimly. "I think you'd better go away."

For one moment Aurea seemed to wilt under his glance. Then she threw herself towards him and flung her arms round his neck.

"Don't," she begged, "don't send me away, Michael."

He flung his head back and gently freed himself from her arms.

"It's not a bit of good, Aurea. You'd better go. Martin, take her down and put her in a cab, will you? Good-bye, Aurea. This is the end."

He stepped back. Aurea looked pitifully from one brother to the other. A scared expression came over her face. She seized her bag and hurried from the room. Before Martin could get to the corridor, she had entered a lift and disappeared. When he came back, he found his brother bent forward in his chair, his hands pressed to his eyes. Martin

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sat on the arm and caught his brother's shoulders. A stifled sob answered the caress. Presently, Michael rose, white and misty-eyed. He stretched his arms and smiled wanly. "Thank God, that's over. It's taken all the strength out of me. I feel very thirsty. How about a drink?"

CHAPTER XVII

ON the following Sunday afternoon, Deborah was seated at the window looking down on to the turf and the trees. The pat of ball on wood came up to her and the cries of children, while from the Zoo came the slow shuffle of thousands of feet, the worthiest Londoners at their pleasure. If she looked back into the room, she would see Martin's rumpled hair over the top of the sofa, his forehead, eyes and nose : from him came the sounds of sheets of paper being testily swept over, and mingled grunts and groans. He was busy. She knew that when he wanted her, as he would, he would come. Martin could on occasions be imperious ; and on none so much as when he was tormented by a problem. So she sat still and let the sun stroke her with his fingers.

The papers that were absorbing Martin had come in by the last post on the previous evening, a bulky packet, heavily sealed and marked "Confidential." Muir had at last solved his conundrum and was presenting his report and suggestions to the three directors. The document ran to fifty close typed folios, speckled with deftly set out calculations, actuarial figures and appended with curving graphs. The involved language of finance complicated the

difficulty of grasping the meaning, "vendors," "mortgagees," "subsidiary undertakings," "assignments," "law of diminishing returns," "contingent liabilities," "invisible profits," "debenture redemption account." After being battered in a whirlpool of figures, Martin was thankful to struggle into the comparatively placid waters of Muir's final deduction. There was no talk of "faith" here. The facts were presented with glaring crudity. The company was solvent; nay, more, was making profits, but these profits were so tied up in stocks, schemes, plant and so forth, that unless the ship could be refuelled it had little likelihood of reaching port. A further elaborate treatise suggested the only possible source of supply for this replenishment: the formation of a public company would not only alleviate the immediate peril; it would also "satisfactorily compensate" the present shareholders. As regarded capitalization, the sum of £250,000 was considered in all circumstances sufficient and the writer further indicated a number of firms, who could be persuaded to underwrite an issue to this amount at a reasonable percentage. This the writer asserted was the only remedy. If it was not taken, there would follow inevitably a gradual shrinking until suddenly the whole fabric would collapse in ruins.

Martin turned the last sheet carefully and laid his head back. This was the end. Not so had his father dreamed the future of his firm. Humanism and light were extinguished; and in their place, a rollicking, farcical, knock-about company offered preposterous philosophies and the false gay radiance

of the arc lamp. These ten years had been a forcing time. Growth had come quickly; the carefully planted seeds had sprung, but the luxuriance that shot up had no roots, and the garden had become a tangle of ill-favoured weeds, so worthless that they shrivelled at a breath from the east.

Nor was this all, he reflected. The morality of the proposed transaction seemed highly dubious. They were, it was true, solvent: but they were infernally leaky. Muir had a genius for figures. A judicious optimism could probably put the position more favourably than it actually was. "Anything can be wangled in the Army;" almost anything can be put the right side of the law in business. "*Caveat emptor*"—"let the buyer keep his eyes open"—was one of those excellent legal maxims that provided the lawyers with bones to gnaw. Steady though! Did that matter? The public, the dividend hunters and speculators deserved what they got. They could sink. But was this house, founded and built by one family through five generations, to be parcelled out to a rabble who would whine and snarl if the rewards of their greediness were insufficient?

"Damn it, it can't be done," he exclaimed violently. He jumped up from the couch, and, kneeling beside Deborah, put his arms round her. She turned from the window, and stroking his hair, asked: "What is it, my little love?"

His mind was confused with a succession of whirling thoughts. He tried to compose them, to put them in order, to concentrate them into a luminous exposition, but he could do no more than

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ejaculate as they turned uppermost in his mind. All that he could say again and again, what he clung to as the root of his sensibility, was "It's wrong ; it's the last betrayal." He led her to the sofa, picked up the report and sat beside her, running down the pages, underlining points with his thumbnail.

"It means, I suppose, that the firm will die unless Muir's prescription is followed ?" she said.

"We'd probably stagger on for a few months, maybe a year or so and then run under."

"You'd rather do that than accept the scheme ?"

"Far rather. There might still have been a chance to get back on to stable lines before. There'll be none now."

"This scheme—have Mike and Sybil considered it ?"

"Of course."

"I mean, before you ?"

The question brought Martin up short. He hadn't thought of it before. Of course, they must have. Mike obviously had known a great deal on the last occasion they had met : but he had put his brother off. Was he going to accept it then ? And if he did, Sybil would too. Martin, with his smallest share, was hopelessly overweighted.

"I suppose they have," he groaned. "I won't stand it. I won't."

"What can you do, dear ?"

"Nothing, unless Mike'll help. Mike will : he must."

She shook her head. "I doubt it's been Mike's work all along," she prophesied. "You can't count

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on him. You'll be beaten, darling. Then what are you going to do ? ”

“ What do you advise ? ”

She shook her head. “ I'm not going to advise you. It's not one of my responsibilities. I'd not forgive myself if you chose wrong on anything I said.”

“ Suppose I sold out and left ? ”

She smiled at him adorably. “ You're not going to catch me. I won't bat an eyelid at any of your suggestions. Listen, my dear love, whatever you choose, whatever you do, is right for me. All I care is that you should be happy. I'd gaily tramp the streets barefoot if I knew you were doing what you wanted to do. When I'm lying by your side, I'm the happiest woman in the world.”

He caught her to him. “ Don't you want houses and palaces and motors and jewels ? ” he asked. She shook her head, smiling, “ Only you,” she said, and raised her mouth to be kissed.

The meeting of the directors of Ords' was called for three o'clock on the Monday. Martin sought his brother's room a quarter of an hour earlier in the hope of finding out his attitude to Muir's report, but Michael had barricaded himself behind Mr. Bodge.

Mr. Bodge was the editor of one of the Ord weekly religious papers. He had in his day been the—by courtesy—literary editor of one of the more conspicuous journals, and was famous up and down the length of Fleet Street for his capacity to dictate four quarto pages of stenography without conveying

a single item of intelligence to the recipient. He was extremely honest, extremely hard working, and a thoroughly good journalist, since he put the paper before his own, and indeed everyone else's interests. Special contributors would receive expensive and mysterious telegrams in the heart of the country towards midnight, running, for example: "Your article splendid but see to-night's *Evening Whirl* interview with Shah of Persia on Sex Equality harmonize your views ring me eleven p.m. without fail," and after shivering for half an hour trying to get through to London, would listen, horrorstruck, while Bodge deciphered his criticism, logged down in shorthand on the backs of envelopes and indicated in a slow bellow the points he wanted stressed.

Now with painstaking thoroughness he was attempting to clarify for Mike, through a mesh of words, his own view of the attitude taken up by the readers of his paper on a point of dogma. Every now and then, Michael would shake his head and say patiently :

"I don't quite understand you, Mr. Bodge," whereupon Bodge would wipe the perspiration from his brow and start all over again. As the hands of the clock drew on towards three, Michael eventually said :

"Well, I leave it to you, but no Arminianism, mind. Get Basket on to it right away," and Bodge duly trotted off on his errand.

"Quite the noblest of his species," commented Michael, as the door closed. "You know we've been running Basket as the 'cheerful canon' in

opposition to St. Paul's. Bodge spoke to him on the telephone on Saturday night and so infuriated him that he ran his face into the mouthpiece trying to get down the wire at our little editor, marked himself something horrid and preached an incoherent but venomous sermon in the cathedral on Sunday on Rabshakeh, the bloke that spoke from the walls of Jerusalem. Good man, Bodge. I hate Basket."

His irreverent commentary ceased abruptly at the entrance of Sybil. She nodded coldly at Martin, sat down, and lighted a cigarette. "Well," she said, "I've looked through Mr. Muir's papers. They seem quite straightforward, don't you think, Michael? I suppose he'd better be told to take the matter up with the underwriters and prepare the prospectus?"

Michael nodded cheerfully. "That's about it, Sybil. We're clearly down and out, so let's fleece the jolly old public to provide us with blankets. I think it sounds all right. Muir says it can be done, and so long as he's prepared to do it, he can."

"Mr. Muir is a very clever man," said Sybil. "He told me he admired my poor Ambrose enormously."

"Then I think that's settled," drawled Michael, deliberately avoiding Martin's eyes. "We'd better call Muir in and go over the details." He made to pick up the telephone receiver, but his hand stopped half-way.

"You're not . . . you're not . . ." Martin stammered hoarsely. Mike paused and smiled ironically.

"I'm not . . . what am I not, brother?"

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"You're not just going to hand over the firm to Muir to deal with according to his scheme?"

"No?" asked his brother. "And what alternative do you propose? No other way out."

"Quite," echoed Sybil, dropping back into her chair and letting her hands fall on the arms. Her eye sought the corner of the room, as if she was supremely uninterested in the conversation. Martin had always appeared to her to have too much of his father in him to be agreeable.

"But to hand over the firm, our firm, like this, to offer it for sale, so to speak, to the first comers, Michael, it's unthinkable."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Lop off all this shoddy magazine side, cut away half the books, go back to the old pre-war methods. You know they were sounder. Get rid of all this speculative stuff and run on economical lines."

"And have no fun and little money. Martin, you're a cuckoo. Always following one idea, just the same as you were at Oxford, just what you did over schools, just your old chatter about traditions."

"At least it's a tradition worth having. You and I are the ninth and tenth Ords who have directed this firm; we've been in business for a hundred and sixty years, and until Father's death, we stuck to our beliefs in spite of bad times. Now, we're just nothing except purveyors of trash. What use is it to me to work ten hours a day in Southwark to turn out cheap magazines and shoddy novels? Give it up, Mike, let's get back on to clean ground again."

Michael shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"We can't. We couldn't if we wanted to. Don't be so absurdly romantic, Martin. Have a little sense of reality, of actual things."

"Last year's catchword was 'Values;' this year's 'Actuality.' We must always be in the movement," sneered his brother savagely.

"I don't move in literary circles; we're printers and publishers, you know," snapped back Michael.

There was a pause. Each eyed the other angrily. Sybil made a movement, but Michael waved her back impatiently.

"Another thing," said Martin, returning to the attack. "You know as well as I do that this fine draft prospectus is all eyewash." He seized the papers. "Here, and here, and here again. Look at the stock figure. Remainder price, you call it. Who's going to buy all that amount of dud stuff? Is there anyone in the kingdom, or the world, for that matter, who'd put down the amount for it. Look at your advances to authors' account. You know as well as I do that half that money's gone and's not recoverable. The only figure I'd trust is the overdraft."

"Yes, but the public don't know. No one outside the trade'll understand a word of what you're talking about."

"It's a crooked deal from start to finish. If you go on with it, I'll talk to the underwriters myself. You've got infected with Ambrose's megalomania."

"Don't you dare to speak of Ambrose," broke in Sybil. She had risen from her chair during the altercation and was standing at Michael's elbow.

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"Why not?" Martin queried hotly. "He was the first author of all this."

Sybil whirled at him. Her eyes narrowed, became venomous. Her face had turned pale. Her lips twisted with spite.

"How dare you speak to us like this? You, with your miserable share. And to tell us we're crooked, you who're living in sin with a chit of a girl no better than she should be. You. You're just like your father, who nearly broke my poor husband's—his son's—heart. You—you *adulterer*."

"Steady on, Sybil," interposed Michael grimly. "Adultery's nothing to do with publishing, except by the printed page." But she turned her cold hatred on him.

"Anyhow, this is the end. Either Martin and Deborah are paid off and dismissed, or I withdraw my money. I've had enough of them in the office. Go they shall."

Michael nearly screamed with exasperation. "Oh, my God!" He caught Martin by the arm. "Go away, go and talk to Deb. I'll see you presently."

Martin stumbled down the corridor and arrived in Deborah's room. She looked up and ran to him, terrified by the livid, exhausted face.

"Darling, are you ill?"

"Not a bit," he said, sitting down heavily. "Only beaten and routed."

Presently Michael came to find him. He poked his head round the door and grinned. "May I come in?" he asked. "You won't bite me?"

"That woman," he groaned, "that ineffable,

holy fraud. I knew she hated you and I guessed she'd taken to hating Deb, because of you. I've pacified her at last, but it took some doing. Now please, brother Martin, be pacified in your turn and let's get on with the work. Don't be obstinate."

Martin shook his head. Deborah watching him saw his breath coming with an effort. He closed his eyes, opened them again with an effort.

"Have your way," he said wearily, "I give in, but we'll clear out—I'm tired and worn out with it. You can buy my shares, Michael, and then" (there came the ghost of a smile) "you'll be king of the castle."

"Don't be so pig-headed. We—I want you here."

"You don't really—you've only got a twinge of conscience. My shares'll come in very useful for holding your bunch of nettles. We'd rather go."

Mike sat silent, checking over his ideas. He wanted Martin to stay with him, partly through affection, partly for support, but most of all because he was lonely. For himself, he didn't care what happened to Ords'; he felt none of his brother's passionate interest in its traditions and career: but he wanted it as something to occupy him, to use him, to fill the vacuum of his existence. Constant occupation only would serve his need: he must have it; he must feed his mind with problems and tasks, each more complicated, each more difficult. His brother's offer assured him of power to do this, to free himself from the devastating interference of his sister-in-law. He cast the two sides against one another, and struck a balance. Martin

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must go. Even so his mind misgave him. Something must be done for his brother.

"I'll talk to Muir," he said at last, rising to his feet. "Don't go without seeing me."

Martin looked across at Deborah. She was still at her desk, but watching him with constant, unmoving eyes. As he looked, she smiled at him with her eyes. He came quickly to her side and knelt.

"Tell me—was I right?"

She looked at him, a mother looking at a child anxious on a point of behaviour.

"Don't you know?"

"I feel rather caddish, dreadfully priggish, but I believe it's the only way."

"You'll be happy?"

"Will you?"

"If you are, I am. Listen, darling, let's go away . . . let's make a bolt for it. Let's shake off all this dust and have two, three months, south in the sun. Your mind's clogged with worrying and mine's as stale. . . . Do let's. Let's go to see places, to try to get back our balance."

"What about the future? I shan't get much money out of the firm. I've got to find work to do."

"Think of it when you come back. My dear, you don't know how wan you've become. You haven't . . . have you had a holiday since you came down from Oxford?"

"Only leave during the war. I've been too busy since I came back."

"Then you must come away. Do. Promise me."

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“All right. I promise.”

“When? At once? Next week?”

He was taken by surprise at her impetuosity. The cloud of the afternoon still hung over him. Everything had crashed and the dust had not yet settled. The subconscious part of his brain was trying ineffectively to piece an exploded chimera together once more. He looked across the room. A mirror hung over the mantelpiece. He caught sight of his face, melancholy, pale and sentimental, and burst into a roar of laughter at it.

“My poor girl, have I been looking like that for long? Why didn’t you shake me? You deserve everything you want. Next Monday, then, and where’ll we go?”

They unearthed a battered atlas, and were bargaining place against place, when Mike’s secretary summoned him.

“I’ve had it out with Muir,” said his brother, as soon as Martin was seated. “He’s disappointed in you. He thought he’d got you converted to idealism. He’s rather shaken at the moment and left me murmuring something about suckers being born every minute.”

“I’m not a good subject for faith healers,” returned Martin.

“Anyhow, he’s gone over figures and he says that it’s a fair do if I give you twelve thousand for your share. I can’t give you a cheque off-hand, but you can have the money by Saturday. Is that all right?”

“There isn’t so much money in the world,” said Martin gravely. “If you can find it, I’ll take it.”

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Michael looked quizzically at his brother.

"What a queer creature you are, Martin. Your share will be worth twice as much in a month's time. Won't you wait for that? No? Seriously, though, I wish you'd stay." He looked wistfully across at his brother. "I want you here, Martin. I do, really. You've been a strength to me in all sorts of bad times, by just standing beside me. Everything I wanted has failed me, and I'm left with nothing except this man-eating business. Have a heart. You've got the girl, the money *and* the car, so to speak. I could fix you up perfectly so that you'd never see Sybil. Stay and help me out."

Martin rose to his feet.

"It's no good, Mike. It's too late. I'm not leaving you, and I'm not leaving Ords'. This isn't it. It's a changeling. Good-bye."

He turned his back and went.

Michael sat watching the closed door through which his brother had passed, until he realized his eyes were dim. He shook his head and picking up the telephone receiver, said: "Ask Mr. Muir to come to me, please."

CHAPTER XVIII

DEBORAH sat, elbows on knees, chin on hands, below a gaily coloured umbrella driven into the sand, gazing out on to clear aquamarine waves. Her thin legs and arms, bare below her bathing dress, were tanned a deep gold. Beneath a bathing cap, her face brooded, was almost mutinous, with the nether lip thrust forward. For a month she and Martin had dwelled in the ramshackle huddle of hotels and beach villas perched on these shifting dunes, only saved from the greedy Atlantic by the roots of desperate pine trees, planted here to encourage the earth. The season was nearing its end. Already many of the gay, gaudy little houses were shut up : the hotels were emptying of their careless, chattering mob. Soon only they two would be left. She wanted to stay. The provisional air of this toy village appealed to her, its very precariousness, the feeling that it might disappear with one in the night and reappear on some far-away shore as a matter of course. It was so cut off from the practical world, with the pine thickets on one side and the ocean on the other. Save for the perpetual swallow of the waves, it was quiet ; a few hundred yards inland it was silent. She could lie here, simply existing in the sun and wind—but for Martin.

At first he had been happy, careless, for ever

shouting with joy, as he rolled headlong down a dune, or lay kicking his legs in the little waves. But as the days passed, he became less buoyant, sat looking out to sea with a puzzled discontentment on his face. At last, one day, he said :

“What are we going to do ? ”

She was lying down basking in the sun, enjoying every sensual moment of the warmth.

“Do ? ” she asked lazily.

“When we leave here.”

“Need we ever ? ”

He looked at her and smiled.

“Baby! I’ve got to work.”

“But need you. Can’t we just be happy ? ”

“We’re not rich,” he reminded her.

“Beyond the dreams of avarice,” she smiled back. “Twelve thousand pounds makes . . . you work it out.”

“Say £600 a year ; five hundred net.”

“That’s wealth, isn’t it ? ”

“Enough for the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, perhaps ; but what about the grocer and the brewer ? ”

She sat up suddenly.

“Martin ! ”

“What ? ”

“You’re not beginning to regret that you left the firm ? ”

“Not a bit—but one must do something, you know.”

“I don’t see the necessity.”

“Don’t you ? ” he asked, and was silent.

There it had stayed for the time. In her heart

Deborah passionately resented this interference of the bustling world. Men were children. They would never be at rest ; they were always requiring toys to play with, and would toddle up with new ones for admiration. Why could not Martin rest ? She looked at his lean body, brown with salt and sun, and reflected how quickly it would pale and decay in the dingy city. Why not just exist ?

“ I don’t want frocks and motors,” she broke out one evening. “ Darling, I want you. I want to be alive, and I want you to be alive, instead of half dead, as you’d be with fatigue and anxiety.”

“ That’s only existence—like a plant.”

“ Plants have their beauty.”

“ Humans find it only in thought and action.”

“ And what a mess they make of it.”

They carried the argument no further. Deborah could see that Martin, beneath his happy exterior, was restless. She resented that, but could find no fair reason for doing so. This morning, she sat here on her throne of sand, and, as she waited for Martin, obstinately pursued fresh inspiration for her case.

Presently he appeared, walking slowly along the shore, a thin exclamation mark in his bathing suit and sandals. He carried a letter in his hand ; and, approaching her, handed it to her with averted eyes. While she read it, he lay down beside her and began to throw pebbles discontentedly at a tussock of grass. A pang of fear shot through her as she read. The letter was from old James Ormiston, to whom Martin had been apprenticed many years before. The writer said that he was on the point of retiring, and having heard from Palliser that Martin had

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parted company with his brother, suggested that he might return to the works in Soho. Ormiston had one son there now, and the vacancy caused by his own retirement would have to be filled. He proposed a six months' trial, and then went on to develop the possibilities of the future. Deborah read it with a sinking heart. She hardly dared look at Martin: but at last in a dry voice she asked:

"What are you going to do?"

"Refuse," he answered sombrely.

She looked across at him quickly; he still, had his eyes fixed seawards. She stretched out a hand and touched him. "Tell me, darling Martin, if it wasn't for me, you'd accept? You're refusing for my sake?"

"Of course you are," she went on, as a smile hovered on his lips. "I won't have it. Beloved, I won't make you miserable. Write and accept Mr. Ormiston's offer, and let's go back to London. Don't look at me like that, my darling. I shall be happy as long as you are. I don't want anything but your contentment. Your life is my life, your desires, mine. I love you. I'm an idiot, no doubt—but I haven't got any life outside your happiness. Can't you understand?"

Martin smiled into her eyes.

"Nonsense," he returned kindly. "You don't want to go back. We can get along very comfortably out here. No, I shall refuse."

He said it without conviction. In his heart, he felt that to refuse would be the end of his life. The question of money meant very little to him, but he must, to live, use his mind and body for more than

mere living. Yet, on the other hand, there was Deborah, and her longing for quiet. He owed her so much ; he must give her some reward. Only, at the back of his mind, there persisted a need crying for expression ; and he felt that if that need was not fed, he would, in the end, become unworthy of what she gave him.

The girl watching his eyes caught some reflection of the thoughts changing behind them. He had given way, but it was an unwilling surrender. If she snatched at it, took what she could get, now, perhaps in the end she would lose everything she was fighting for. How strange it was that while he possessed all her mind, she could only capture part of his, that something, airy and mocking, eluded her net, would never come to her lure. She crept close to him and leaned against his shoulder.

"You don't believe me, my dear. It's quite true. I'm so utterly in your hands that I can't risk your being unhappy. Please try to understand, beloved. I couldn't bear that one day you might reproach me in your mind. I want you to go back. One day perhaps you'll come to me and want to come away of your own free will ; and then I'll have no hesitation. But till then—oh, Martin, I love you, so that your griefs are my pains, and your pleasures, my joy. Everything, my mind and my body, cries for yours. You must believe me. You do."

He turned and looked down at the flushed, pleading young face.

"I do," he said soberly.

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Ten days later, a night of wind and blown drizzle, the train drew them over Charing Cross bridge. Instinctively Martin raised his head, and looked down river. The lights of the Cecil and Savoy gleamed as if for eternity. Beyond them, from a dark square mass there suddenly flickered from the cupola a circle of light, green, then red, then white, jumped, raced and returned. O-O-O-it passed. Insensibly his hand tightened upon hers. Then he looked down and saw her eyes wet. He slid an arm round her, and murmured: "Never mind, my lamb." She smiled up at him through her tears. "Dear love, I am happy."

